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# Trickle-down paternalism : Mayor Angelo Rossi's embrace of New Deal style

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TRICKLE-DOWN PATERNALISM:  
MAYOR ANGELO ROSSI'S EMBRACE OF NEW DEAL STYLE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Ronald R. Rossi

May 2009

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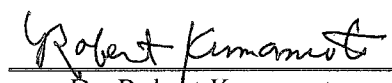
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TRICKLE-DOWN PATERNALISM:  
MAYOR ANGELO ROSSI'S EMBRACE OF NEW DEAL STYLE

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## ABSTRACT

### TRICKLE-DOWN PATERNALISM: MAYOR ANGELO ROSSI'S EMBRACE OF NEW DEAL STYLE

by Ronald R. Rossi

Tracing the evolution toward New Deal philosophy by Angelo J. Rossi, mayor of San Francisco (1931-1944), this paper examines the effect of national politics at local levels during the Great Depression and the change of a conservative Republican mayor who initially did not embrace the New Deal philosophy into one who extolled its virtues and promoted its programs. In over 20,000 newspapers articles, Rossi's career is chronicled, emphasizing his gradual but increasing shift to a New Deal philosophy and his presentation of himself as a paternalistic leader to the citizens of San Francisco. The paper further traces the citizenry embracing Rossi as it did President Roosevelt.

Rossi's dealings with the United States Conference of Mayors and the link between the larger urban centers and the federal government are also chronicled and analyzed. The United States Conference of Mayors allowed a development of a symbiotic relationship between New Deal mayors and FDR. This enhanced and promoted paternalism on both the federal and local levels.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The genesis of this thesis requires some explanation. When I was growing up, the family scuttlebutt was that Angelo J. Rossi, mayor of San Francisco from 1931 to 1944, was in some way related, but nobody seemed to know much about him or his family. As it turned out, Angelo Rossi's father and the author's great-grandfather, Antonio Rossi, were brothers who immigrated from Italy to California (specifically, to the city of Volcano in the gold fields). As my interest in history blossomed into a pursuit of a graduate degree, Rossi's life seemed more intriguing. Taking a course in nationalism was an ideal springboard for delving into Rossi as an Italian-American mayor of a major city and analyzing the dilemmas he faced as a second-generation Italian in a large and diverse metropolis.

Finding primary sources seemed a daunting task; however, my long-time legal assistant, Molly Edgar, gave me the now out-of-print book *North Beach: The Italian Heart of San Francisco*, and I then found *Hometown San Francisco: Sunny Jim, Phat Willie, and Dave* at a rare-books shop. Rossi's career was described only briefly in both books, but then I was able to locate his granddaughter, Rose Marie Cleese, and obtain the dream of every historian: an overwhelming stockpile of primary sources. Apparently, when Rossi was first appointed mayor in 1931, someone in his office hired a clipping service. The clippings were pasted into 20 invoice books measuring approximately 20" x 15". Each volume contained over 100 pages with an average of 10-15 clippings on each side, starting from the inception of his mayoralty in 1931 to the day he left office in January 1944. The articles apparently, but not certainly, cover every newspaper in which

Rossi or his family was ever mentioned. Each volume has a start and stop date noted, except the last book, which starts on April 26, 1943 and ends with a blank, as though everyone walked out of the office and turned the lights off when Rossi was defeated in his last election.

These volumes contained approximately 22,000 articles which I had copied and entered into a database.<sup>1</sup> They are a history of the public Rossi as depicted in the newspapers of the time, from the East Coast to the West Coast. With Rose Marie's consent, the volumes have been painstakingly copied—not an easy task, as some of the articles are over 75 years old and, being pasted into the books, overlap one another. Rose Marie was entrusted with the books by her mother, who recognized her deep interest in her grandfather. She has preserved them these many years in their original format with the intent of writing a book on her grandfather at some point. In addition, I obtained a scrapbook of clippings from Angelo Rossi's other living great-granddaughter, Cynthia Morris, which covered the period of 1925 (Rossi's failure to be reelected as Supervisor). Without their permission to see and copy these clippings, this paper and any further research would not be possible, and I wish to thank them for their help and encouragement. I would also like to thank Advanced Discovery Services, Inc. for treating these books so carefully and giving them the gentle treatment an original primary source of this type deserves.

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<sup>1</sup> For those who wish to view any of the entries, they are categorized as follows: Election Issues, Hetch Hetchy Dam, Labor Issues, New Deal Relief/New Deal Jobs, New Deal/Projects, New Deal/Relief, Political Appointments, Public Persona, Public Transit, World War II.



Finally, I would like to thank my legal assistant, Molly Edgar, for her tireless work in deciphering my dictation and scribbled handwriting and for helping to make the completion of this thesis possible.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the American mayor was faced with the day-to-day problems of the city. Whatever their party, voters looked to their mayor to ensure the welfare of the city, irrespective of what was taking place on the national scene. However, during the Great Depression, the national economy was so closely tied to the local economy that mayors soon realized the importance of federal relief, projects, and military bases as a source of their continued political power and stability.

However, in its infancy, the New Deal was not openly supported or publicly approved by San Francisco businessmen or politicians, most of whom were staunchly conservative life-long Republicans. Their prevailing view was that any able-bodied male who was not able to gain employment was lazy and worthless. It was argued that relief on a national basis provided by the federal government, including some of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's earliest programs, should not be used to foster local projects.<sup>2</sup> The stigma that was associated with being dependent on the dole was overwhelmingly polemical for the general population as well. The prevailing view was that, irrespective of economic conditions, the unemployed should be grouped with the physically disabled.<sup>3</sup> The view of Angelo J. Rossi, Republican mayor of San Francisco from 1931 to 1944, was no exception to this intellectual and social view.

Rossi, however, was not unlike other Depression-era mayors of large urban metropolises. He realized early on that the national electorate turned to Franklin Delano

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<sup>2</sup> Roger W. Lotchin, ed., *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 71.

Roosevelt as a paternalistic leader and as a president who would guide this country out of the Great Depression, a president who would utilize revolutionary political and economic remedies to reverse the unyielding economic catastrophe that continued years after the stock market crash in 1929. This thesis will examine the historical context in which the electorate of San Francisco and other major U.S. cities sought the same paternalistic leadership in its mayors. It will focus on the mayoralty of Angelo Rossi as a case study of a large metropolitan center that utilized a strong mayor elected by popular vote as opposed to cities that appointed mayors or cities in which the city-manager form of government was operative. This thesis will argue that San Franciscans did, in fact, look to their mayor in a way closely aligned with the way they viewed their president. Further, it will demonstrate that in local politics, urban dwellers focused on national issues, including the alphabet soup of federal New Deal programs that could provide employment at local levels. Local politics were dominated by national issues. The Depression was an era of great stress and economic upheaval. Some citizens became alienated; others, however, turned to their mayor. The Depression-era mayor was “the personification of the city.”<sup>4</sup> As such, the mayor was expected to be a “visible, responsive, and communicative representative of the authority at commencement, ribbon cuttings, and other ceremonies.”<sup>5</sup> Angelo Rossi and other successful mayors of the period realized the need to adopt this paternalistic style and embrace the economic and social policies of the New Deal in order to be viewed locally as FDR was viewed

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<sup>4</sup> Richard M. Flanagan, *Mayors and the Challenge of Urban Leadership* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2004), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

nationally. In San Francisco, Rossi suspended his ideological commitment to fiscal conservatism and copied Roosevelt's pragmatism, paternalism, and willingness to experiment. National paternalism did in fact trickle down to the municipal level. The mayors could not help but see that the FDR style inspired confidence and ameliorated fear. His image and visibility were duplicated on a local level in an effort to bring home federal money to create jobs and prosperity.

## II. ROOSEVELT AND THE MAYORS

Once the populace realized that the economic volatility caused by the Depression was long-term, there was an even greater need for security and stability and a need for leadership that would remedy economic and social ills with bold and dynamic programs. It is not surprising, therefore, that Herbert Hoover's bid for reelection in 1932 was soundly rejected. In spite of the large Republican majorities previously enjoyed by the GOP, Roosevelt's election that year was probably inevitable. In times of great crisis when political leaders seemed frozen in time, the citizenry not only wanted someone new with new programs but someone who would look out for its interests and not merely the interests of big business. The electorate sought a president who could not only comprehend its problems but with whom it could feel a strong personal relationship. Roosevelt was in fact considered the first president to "personalize the Presidency."<sup>6</sup> He was the first to create an atmosphere that citizens did in fact have some "intimate contact with the President."<sup>7</sup>

Times were extremely hard, although Herbert Hoover used the term "depression" as a term of confidence, as opposed to using the term "panic" or "crisis." The 1929 stock market crash and continued economic chaos were devastating.<sup>8</sup> The gross national product plunged 78 percent, expenditures for consumption declined 18 percent, new construction virtually disappeared, and new investments were reduced by 98 percent. Unemployment was as high as 24.9 percent: those thrifty individuals who had eschewed

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<sup>6</sup> Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1984), p. xix.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

the dole, who had painstakingly saved money, were equally devastated when their savings were wiped out by a rash of bank failures. Between the crash and March of 1933, more than 5,000 banks closed their doors. It was one thing to be out of work, but losing one's hard-earned savings due to bank failures created emotional and economic stress of unbridled proportions.<sup>9</sup> In addition to lost jobs and lost savings, there were nearly half a million foreclosures in 1932. The basic necessity of shelter was lost by many Americans. The domino effect of this economic chaos escalated with decreasing revenues to states due to huge property tax delinquencies. States were unable to pay for basic services: "By any standard, the United States was in its worst crisis since the Civil War."<sup>10</sup> These times called for new leadership, and in 1932, an overwhelming majority elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president.

From Andrew Jackson forward, presidential politicians attempted to portray themselves as the common man or as having common origins. Roosevelt was hardly the common man, and he was hardly disadvantaged. His father, James Roosevelt, was a distant cousin of Theodore Roosevelt. His mother, Sarah Delano Roosevelt, was the daughter of Warren Delano, who was not only extremely wealthy but the epitome of the New England upper crust. The Roosevelt family's standing was almost equally high. James Roosevelt's first son by a previous marriage had married into the Astor family, and Sarah Delano's uncle, Franklin Astor, had married William Astor's sister. Obviously, the *de facto* merger of the Roosevelt, Delano, and Astor families would lead to Roosevelt's

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> David M. Kennedy, *The American People in the Great Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, p. 75.

elite and privileged upbringing. The Roosevelt family, including his distant cousin Theodore Roosevelt, was often considered an example of “American aristocratic paternalism.”<sup>11</sup> Given the fact that “an elite heritage was taken as a severe political handicap,” Roosevelt’s ability to be seen as a friend of the ordinary people, a friend of “the forgotten man,” was “one based not on the equality but on *noblesse oblige*.”<sup>12</sup> Roosevelt was considered the epitome of the English country gentleman reincarnated in the White House, but irrespective of his background, he did win the absolute allegiance of the unemployed and socially disadvantaged during the Depression era. One could attribute his success to his “patrician background and supreme security and sense of stewardship.”<sup>13</sup> Surveys indicated that Roosevelt was admired most often and more highly by those listed as “lower class,” but he was also held in high esteem by middle-class and upper-middle-class citizens.

Social legislation by the aristocratic class during the early nineteenth century was not unheard of, and the Roosevelt family took that paternalistic approach to those who were disadvantaged. Franklin Roosevelt was described as “a tremendously powerful man who still is personable, very human, and who still champions the little man’s cause” and a “truly admirable man.”<sup>14</sup> The perception of the common man was that Roosevelt would have the power and the confidence to change the American political scene at all levels to restore jobs and reverse the Depression.

The year 1932 not only saw the nation roundly rejecting Herbert Hoover, but

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



there was also a great shift in political power. Democrats gained ninety seats in the House and thirteen in the Senate, and Republicans won only six of the thirty-four Senate races. The Democrats obtained a 56.6 percent plurality in the House, up from their previous 44.9 percent high.<sup>15</sup> Upon Roosevelt taking the oath of office on March 5, 1933, extreme actions were taken that previously would have been impossible. Even though these actions initially had little economic effect, Roosevelt “was still the great hope in the midst of this fear.”<sup>16</sup> Roosevelt’s power and paternalistic approach is best described by Martha Geohorn’s 1934 report as quoted in McElvaine:

Every house I visited—mill worker or unemployed—had a picture of the President. These ranged from newspaper clippings (in destitute homes) to large coloured prints, framed in gilt cardboard. The portrait holds the place of honour over the mantel; I can only compare this to the Italian peasant’s Madonna. And the feeling of these people for the President is one of the most remarkable emotional phenomena I have ever met. He is at once God and their intimate friend; he knows them all by name, knows their little town and mill, their little lives and problems. And, though everything fails, he is there, and will not let them down.<sup>17</sup>

On March 6, 1933, Roosevelt declared a bank holiday and called Congress into session. On March 12, he gave his first Fireside Chat.<sup>18</sup> Initially, Roosevelt concerned himself more with domestic issues than with international affairs. Still, while the country was “generally indifferent to outside events,”<sup>19</sup> he did take action abroad that would cause great international concern vis-à-vis the United States and other countries in halting gold exports, removing gold backing from the U.S. dollar, and allowing the dollar to

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

inflate with regard to foreign currency.<sup>20</sup>

Roosevelt was elected for an unprecedented four terms, breaking a tradition held for close to 150 years and ignoring the admonition of George Washington in his farewell address, where he advocated no more than two terms for a president. This long tradition was swept aside in large part because of the paternalistic qualities Roosevelt demonstrated. Roosevelt, however, was also the superb politician. His political maneuvering with various big-city mayors during the Depression is legendary.<sup>21</sup>

Roosevelt soon learned through New Deal programs that allegiance of big-city mayors, irrespective of political party, was critical to continued political success.<sup>22</sup> One author has taken a rather dim view of Roosevelt's sincerity:

To millions of Americans Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a sincere, warm human being who felt a deep love for the people. Roosevelt may have been loved "by the people" in abstract, but when one examines his heartless, disloyal, and ultimately ruinous treatment of individuals he pretended to befriend, it makes one stop and wonder if he ever did anything without considering his own political self-interest.<sup>23</sup>

Roosevelt's relationship with big-city mayors during the Depression has been described as a relationship designed for his own political benefit.<sup>24</sup> These mayors included Fiorello LaGuardia (1882–1947), mayor of New York (1934–1945); James Curley (1874–1958), mayor of Boston (1914–1917, 1922–1925, 1930–1933, 1946–1949); Frank Couzens (1902–1950), mayor of Detroit (1933–1938); and even Socialist mayor Daniel Hoan (1881–1961), mayor of Milwaukee (1916–1940). In San Francisco, Mayor Angelo J.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Lyle W. Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Rossi was not immune to Roosevelt's machinations

A symbiotic mutual support existed between LaGuardia and Roosevelt. The disproportionate amount of Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds that were granted to New York City throughout the Roosevelt administration is ample evidence of this relationship. Federal spending in New York City was far more than in any other American city. As a consequence, the city turned out for Roosevelt in unprecedented numbers.<sup>25</sup> Further, LaGuardia as a president of the national Conference of Mayors was the catalyst in Roosevelt's dealings with other big-city mayors.

Roosevelt and the big-city mayors were cognizant of the many political benefits obtained from federal government spending in local improvement projects. Roosevelt was more than quick to make "inspection" tours of various WPA and Public Works Administration (PWA) sites. Not only did he promote the New Deal on these so-called inspection tours, but he also reinforced the local mayor as well. The symbiotic relationship continued with many New Deal mayors during the Depression.<sup>26</sup> The New Deal did offer strong economic and political benefits to various mayors who were wise enough to embrace the concept of federal relief at a local level—mayors who could politically, philosophically, and emotionally embrace this paradigm in federal-city relations.

One cannot overestimate the fact that prior to the New Deal, cities had little leverage when it came to dealing with the federal government. Cities were clearly subordinate to states and dependent on state government. In many cases, cities were

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-60.

ignored by state governments.<sup>27</sup> The United States Constitution makes no provisions whatsoever for cities. The New Deal provided the impetus to create a new federal-city relationship. With the creation of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 1932, there existed an organization to represent cities that needed help as they never had before.

According to Richard M. Flanagan, “Interestingly, and perhaps incongruously, scholars of the city do not take mayoral politics as seriously as the newspapers, think tanks, and the public. In a search for the laws of behavior that shape the city, the social sciences typically bypass city halls and look toward more fundamental factors of urban life, like demography and economy.”<sup>28</sup> Whether or not Flanagan’s assessment is correct, during the Depression, successful mayors of large urban centers were some of the few if not the only elected officials in the United States with a “genuine, close, daily human contact with the voters of the big city.”<sup>29</sup> The Depression-era mayor was not removed from the populace by layers of bureaucracy. He or she was not a remote figure. The mayor did not have a large staff of assistants, public relations experts, and the like to insulate him or her from the populace. Yet, the mayor was expected not only to be the symbol of unity but also the chief of state, chief legislator, and chief executive. He was expected to provide jobs and relief on a local level as FDR was doing on a federal level.<sup>30</sup>

Depression-era mayors varied in their approach to the New Deal. LaGuardia, however, realized early on that it was important to identify himself with federal relief

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> John J. Gunther, *Federal-City Relations in the United States: The Role of the Mayors in Federal Aid to Cities* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Flanagan, *Mayors*, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Melvin G. Holli and Peter d’A. Jones, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors, 1820–1980* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. xi.

programs as promulgated by New Deal legislation. Gaining federal relief monies meant dealing with Civil Works Administration (CWA) administrator and later Works Progress Administration (WPA) administrator, Harry Hopkins. It also meant dealing with the administrator of the Public Works Administration (PWA), Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. LaGuardia, unlike his predecessors who eschewed federal involvement, broke tradition and embraced the federal-relief programs.<sup>31</sup> LaGuardia also embraced the concept of personal popularity and public persona. The New Deal economic interventions with federal aid to cities broke with earlier American tradition. Cities and their mayors soon learned that they had to work with the federal government to create jobs.<sup>32</sup> The economic and political power did in fact reside in Washington, D.C., during the Depression, but that did not prevent mayors from taking advantage of the system.<sup>33</sup> Federal aid to cities upset the equilibrium of an older system in a profound way. Relief from the federal government directly to cities altered the dynamics of local politics.

According to Holli and Jones in the *Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors*, the mayor's office is unique—an office of considerable power and authority that “is often filled by men and, nowadays, women, of humble economic and social backgrounds and very diverse ethnic and religious origins.”<sup>34</sup> In their work, Holli and Jones focused on fifteen major American cities, one of their criteria being that the cities

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<sup>30</sup> Flanagan, *Mayors*, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>32</sup> Melvin G. Holli, *The American Mayor: The Best & the Worst Big-City Leaders* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p. 119.

<sup>33</sup> David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Holli and Jones, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 1.

had “maintained consistent leadership and popularity and historical importance.”<sup>35</sup>

When one analyzes the mayors elected during the period from Roosevelt’s election in 1932 through 1944, there is a demonstrated trickle-down effect of the paternalistic approach of the mayor toward the populace. Many crisis-era mayors elected by popular vote as opposed to those elected by the city-manager styles of government developed local styles that mirrored Roosevelt’s. The year 1932 was selected as a starting point because it was at that point that the majority of the populace believed the Depression was not going to be resolved quickly; 1944 was chosen as the end point because by that time, the populace was of the belief that World War II would shortly be resolved and the United States would face new and unique challenges.

During the period 1932-1944, whether or not big-city mayors were later considered outstanding examples of leadership if they developed a paternalistic approach to the electorate and were able to create a persona that they could bring home federal money, they were elected and reelected for long tenures.

In Melvin Holli’s work *The American Mayor: The Best & the Worst Big-City Leaders*, only two Depression-era mayors were ranked in the top ten of all-time big-city mayors: they were Fiorello LaGuardia of New York and Frank Murphy of Detroit. LaGuardia was ranked first of all big-city mayors for any period, and Murphy ranked seventh.<sup>36</sup> In ranking the Depression-era mayors, Holli cites three: Hoan of Milwaukee, Murphy of Detroit, and LaGuardia of New York. Hoan, however, is not ranked in the top ten. The Depression-era mayors were described as task-oriented mayors who represented

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

stability and the ability to obtain federal relief monies.

LaGuardia was considered a task-oriented type of leader, the type who is driven by strong goals and desires achievements that are concrete and measurable.<sup>37</sup> Hoan was also considered a task-oriented leader. While LaGuardia was credited with creating a relationship between the city and federal government through the United States Conference of Mayors and the New Deal, Hoan was credited for taking revolutionary socialism into a municipal government reform movement. None of the Depression-era leaders was a so-called “relationship-oriented” leader. These are considered the type of mayors who seek consensus through relationships—the so-called “Mr. Nice Guys.”<sup>38</sup> An analysis of successful mayors based on their reelection for long tenures indicates that an important factor was their ability to deliver federal money for local projects. In Holli and Jones’ analysis, those mayors who were consistently reelected during the period 1932-1944 were those who were able to have a relationship with the federal government on the one hand and the local citizens on the other and clearly demonstrated the ability to bring federal money to the municipal level. These politicians capitalized on their ability to work with the federal government in this new era of relationships between the federal government and municipalities.

Baltimore was typical. Only one mayor was elected between 1932 and 1944. Howard Jackson, who was described as a mayor who spent New Deal money on “valuable and lasting projects,” was a man who modernized the city and established

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<sup>36</sup> Holli, *The American Mayor*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

central control.<sup>39</sup>

Boston presents a similar pattern. It had only three mayors during the period. The first, James Curley, served various terms as mayor; however, he was elected during one of the periods under discussion, 1930–1934. He is considered “a classic Irish city boss”<sup>40</sup> and a mayor of the poor. Curley was a strong Roosevelt supporter. He was succeeded by Frederick Mansfield, 1934–1938, and Maurice Tobin, 1938–1944. Mansfield disagreed with the philosophy of the New Deal, yet he went to Washington and successfully negotiated New Deal money for the city. He left office in 1937 and was succeeded by Tobin, another New Deal mayor—another fiscally conservative politician who was not adverse to utilizing New Deal programs and money to help Depression-ridden Boston.<sup>41</sup>

Buffalo had three mayors during this period. The first was George Zimmerman, elected in 1933 as a Democrat. He was endorsed by Roosevelt and was a New Deal mayor. The second, Thomas Holling, was elected mayor on a platform of reform.<sup>42</sup> He was followed by Joseph Kelly, elected as a Democratic mayor in 1941. Kelly also had strong ties to Washington and sought federal funds to help secure the city’s large debt.

Chicago elected only one mayor during the period, Edward Kelly (1933-1947). Kelly enjoyed great patronage from the New Deal administration and obtained substantial federal grants for Chicago, including sizable WPA programs.<sup>43</sup> He was reelected in 1935, 1939, and 1943 by a substantial majority based on an ethnic coalition of Democrats

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<sup>39</sup> Holli and Jones, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 180.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.



and strong Washington ties.

Cleveland is another example of a large urban center having few mayors during the period. Carl Burton, a Republican mayor elected in 1935 and in 1939, later became a U.S. senator and supreme court justice. He was a fiscal conservative, a Republican, who embraced the New Deal philosophy. He was replaced by Democrat Frank Lausche, another popular mayor who worked to improve city projects with New Deal money. He went on to serve as governor of Ohio.

In Detroit, Frank Murphy was elected mayor in 1930. Murphy was a Depression-era Democrat who supported public welfare and created a mayor's unemployment committee. Murphy convened the Conference of Mayors in 1932 to receive federal aid and was elected president of the United States Conference of Mayors in 1933. He was a strong supporter of Roosevelt; ultimately, he became governor of Michigan and was elevated to the U.S. Supreme Court, where he served with distinction until his death in 1949.<sup>44</sup> Murphy was followed by Frank Couzens, who was elected in 1933 and served two terms. He is credited with restoring Detroit's financial credibility by cutting debt, balancing the budget, and improving city finances. Again, his administration linked local improvement programs and federal programs.<sup>45</sup> He was not defeated in his final election; in 1937, he decided to go back into private business. No doubt, he would have remained in office had he so desired, based on his popularity. Edward Jeffries was elected again in 1941 and 1943 and who has the "distinction of being Detroit's mayor for a longer period

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

than any other previous incumbent.”<sup>46</sup> He was considered a mayor who restored integrity to Detroit, a friend of labor, and a champion of public works projects, including the city’s expressway system and citywide slum clearance.<sup>47</sup>

Los Angeles also had only two mayors elected during the period. The first was Frank Shaw, elected in June 1933 and reelected in May 1937, a Republican who dealt with the Roosevelt administration admirably in obtaining federal funds. His successor was Fletcher Bowron, another Republican reform mayor who was elected with an overwhelming majority in 1938. He was reelected three subsequent times and is credited with restoring faith in city government in an urban center that had previously been regarded as “the most corrupt city in the nation.”<sup>48</sup>

Milwaukee also had few mayors during this tumultuous period. Daniel Hoan, was the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee for over twenty-four years. He was originally elected in 1916 and served until almost 1940. Two of his reelections were in 1932 and 1936. Despite Hoan’s socialistic party allegiance, his paternalistic style led him to a record of eliminating graft, working with health and safety issues, and achieving debt reduction while remaining a working man’s champion.

In New York, it is Fiorello LaGuardia, elected in 1933, who is considered the most outstanding mayor in United States history. LaGuardia was a Republican with substantial ties to the New Deal. He was reelected in 1937 and again in 1941.

The first mayor of Philadelphia during the relevant period was Samuel Wilson,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

another Republican, who won his first term in 1936. In 1939, Robert Lamberton was elected mayor—another Republican who worked closely with the WPA and other New Deal projects.

Pittsburgh's first mayor during this period was William McNair, a Democrat who served a tumultuous term beginning in 1933 but resigned due to battles with the city council in 1936. He was succeeded by Cornelius Scully; after completing McNair's unfinished term, Scully was elected in his own right in 1937 and reelected in 1941. He cooperated closely with New Deal programs and worked tirelessly to obtain federal money for urban revitalization, including a downtown renewal plan, a reduction in smoke emissions, and flood-control issues.

### III. ANGELO ROSSI BEFORE THE NEW DEAL

To be successful both politically and fiscally, Depression-era mayors of large cities had to have ties to New Deal programs that would promote jobs and provide citizens necessary welfare relief. Irrespective of political party or philosophical view, these mayors had to have a visible relationship with the Roosevelt administration. The mayors who were successful were results-oriented rather than ideological. Angelo Rossi, mayor of San Francisco from 1931 to 1944, was no exception.

Rossi, who served as mayor for thirteen years, was a protégé of Mayor James Rolph, who was extremely popular and had the longest-running term as mayor in the city. Rolph was elected governor in 1931, and Rossi was chosen by the board of supervisors to fill out the remainder of Rolph's term as mayor.<sup>49</sup> Rolph was an advocate of strong city government and a task-oriented mayor who promoted growth and development and non-partisan consensus among unions, businessmen, and others who voted for various bond issues. He had a vision of the "urban greatness" of San Francisco.<sup>50</sup> San Francisco was in heated competition with Los Angeles. Rolph was a strong advocate of the Hetch Hetchy water system as well as other programs that would allow San Francisco to compete with other West Coast urban centers.

Rossi's phenomenal success as a Republican, anti-militant-labor Rolph protégé must be contrasted with the view of Italian-Americans held by many citizens of San Francisco. There is no question that in the early 1930s, Italian-Americans were close to

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<sup>49</sup> Theodore Rosenof, *Dogma, Depression, and the New Deal: The Debate of Political Leaders over Economic Recovery* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 47.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

if not at the bottom of the American social and economic hierarchy. Italian-Americans' long-simmering sense of unfairness and mistreatment led many to promote and defend Fascism and Mussolini. This was an issue in LaGuardia's election in 1933; he was elected because he was considered the best man, but he met opposition because he was Italian.<sup>51</sup> Italians in San Francisco, however, did not have the same desire to assimilate into American society as was the case in many urban centers, and because they lived such an insular life in the North Beach area, some contended they were unaware of discrimination.<sup>52</sup>

Only 30 percent of the Italians in San Francisco had become citizens by 1920. This must be compared with 70 percent of the Germans and 76 percent of the of Irish. By 1930, 44 percent of the male Italians in San Francisco had become citizens, while only 31 percent of the female Italians obtained citizenship.<sup>53</sup> With the exception of Angelo Rossi, few Italians were elected to public office until long after the 1930s.<sup>54</sup> For example, in election years 1909 through 1971, thirty-eight people of Irish descent were elected to San Francisco's board of supervisors, whereas only eleven people of Italian descent were similarly inducted.<sup>55</sup>

Despite his Italian heritage, Rossi was aided in becoming a paternalistic leader when in 1930, a charter revision gave the mayor of San Francisco considerably more

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<sup>51</sup> Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>54</sup> Frederick M. Wirt, *Power in the City: Decision Making in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 238.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

power and authority than had previously been granted.<sup>56</sup> The new charter not only reduced the number of supervisors from eighteen to eleven, but their authority was also curtailed. The supervisors were now clearly prohibited from taking any role in the executive branch of government. After a close election, charter revisions became law on January 8, 1932.<sup>57</sup> A sizable percentage of Catholics opposed the charter revisions, wanting a direct election of the board of education as opposed to appointment by a newly created chief administrative officer. Labor also opposed the revisions, again because of the extreme power of the chief administrative officer, who could be terminated by only a two-thirds vote of the board of supervisors or by actual voter recall.<sup>58</sup> A mayor could not gain local or national prominence without a strong city charter granting broad executive authority.

The success of each of the big-city mayors during the Depression was also due to their organizing abilities. It is hard to overestimate the fact that there was no federal-city relationship in existence prior to the United States Conference of Mayors. Before 1932, there was no political organization in place to deal with federal-city relations.<sup>59</sup> Cities were, of course, subordinate to federal and state political authority. According to one author, “cities had no constitutional status whatsoever and therefore no legal basis for recognition by or for an active relationship with the federal government.”<sup>60</sup>

Given the fact that “America has never had a coherent and consistent federal-

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

urban policy,”<sup>61</sup> urban problems became a national issue only during a period of depression or other crisis. Since mayors of large cities were convinced that the Depression would result in great unemployment and other economic catastrophes, the Depression-era mayors saw a need to gain federal support in spite of the mayors’ previous individualistic, autonomous natures. It is from this vantage point that we view Mayor Angelo J. Rossi.

Rossi’s father, Angelo Rossi, Sr., immigrated in December of 1849 to California from Italy on a ship loaded with marble headed for America via Spain, eventually settling in the gold town of Volcano in the Sierra foothills of Amador County.<sup>62</sup> No doubt Rossi’s father immigrated not only due to the lure of the discovery of gold in 1848 but also due to the civil chaos prevailing during the unification of the Italian peninsula. The Rossi family lived in the small Italian village of Reppia, located in the mountains above the Mediterranean coastal town of Chiavari south of Genoa. This village and other similarly situated mountain villages contributed a majority of Italians immigrating to the Gold Country in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>63</sup>

Angelo Rossi was born in Volcano in January 1878, the sixth of seven children. His father had opened a general store, “Angelo Rossi General Merchandise,” in Volcano.<sup>64</sup> In 1868, an Amador County poll listed Angelo Rossi, Sr., at the age of thirty-five as a hotelkeeper and his younger brother, Antonio Rossi (the author’s great-grandfather), as a miner. They both reported being naturalized citizens as opposed to

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Cleese, Rose Marie, personal memoirs in the author’s possession.

<sup>63</sup> Fregulia, Carolyn, *Italians of the Gold Country: Images of America* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), p. 25.

native citizens.<sup>65</sup> The poll list contains very few Italian names. The *Stockton Record* on October 30, 1933, showed a photograph of the Angelo Rossi store taken in Volcano in 1878, showing the Rossi family and the infant Angelo Rossi in the arms of his mother.

When Angelo, Jr. was six years old, his father died. When he was twelve, the family and home were devastated by fire. Angelo's widowed mother and he and his six siblings were forced to move to San Francisco.<sup>66</sup> Rossi's mother barely spoke English, and therefore it would be reasonable to conclude that he was raised in a household with a mother and siblings whose primary language was the Italian dialect of Genovese. Angelo began work as a cash boy for a department store and an errand boy for a local florist. He left school after the sixth grade to work in the florist trade.

Angelo Rossi married Grace Mabel Allen on April 16, 1902, in Old St. Mary's Church in San Francisco. Grace, who was born in Chico, California, and had moved with her family to San Francisco as a small child, was of English-Irish descent. The young couple originally lived with Rossi's mother in North Beach before moving to their own flat in the Fillmore district. Eventually they settled in a spacious home in the city's Cow Hollow district.<sup>67</sup> The couple had three children, one of whom, Eleanor, joined Rossi on many of his trips as mayor due to his wife's desire to stay out of public life.<sup>68</sup>

Rossi ultimately established his own florist shop on Kearny Street, which was totally destroyed in the 1906 earthquake.<sup>69</sup> In the rebuilding of downtown, his first

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22 (with picture of the store).

<sup>65</sup> Poll list, Volcano Precinct Township 3, Amador County, 1868.

<sup>66</sup> Cleese memoirs.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*



significant foray into civic affairs, he opened another store on Kearny Street just two years after the earthquake and fire. His final florist store was in a gleaming Art Deco building at 45 Grant Avenue.

Rossi's civic-mindedness and desire to be involved politically and to assimilate into the society of San Francisco was noteworthy. In 1914, he was appointed a member of the San Francisco Playground Commission. Rossi was elected to the board of supervisors in 1921. He served as the chairman of the finance committee and foreman of the San Francisco Grand Jury in 1928. He served as president of a local hospital and as director of the Florists' Telegraph Delivery Association. From 1920 to 1921, he was the organizing director and president of the Downtown Business Association. In 1922, as a supervisor, he promoted legislation providing for a municipal organization and bureau to buy office supplies in a centralized manner.<sup>70</sup>

Rossi in some ways was typical of many Italians who migrated into San Francisco. The city represented an emerging economy in California, both before and after the earthquake, with a harbor and the first city railroad connected to the east.<sup>71</sup> Two-thirds of the immigrants in San Francisco were Irish, German, Chinese, and Italian. The Italians, however, were the last group to arrive, with a major influx between 1900 and 1924. By 1920, the Italians represented the largest group of foreign-born with 16 percent.<sup>72</sup> Northern Italians were 70 percent of the total Italian immigrants in the city between 1899 and 1914. There was therefore a strong base to which a conservative

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Cinel, *From Italy*, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

businessman such as Rossi could turn as a budding politician.<sup>73</sup> In other respects, he was not typical: he married a non-Italian and made great efforts to become assimilated, forming connections with non-Italian friends and business associates. After his first term as supervisor, Rossi ran for reelection and was supported by the major San Francisco newspapers. The *San Francisco Herald* on October 2, 1925, strongly supported Rossi based on his civic efforts, his four years of what they called “outstanding service,” and with an exceptional record. His list of supporters included then-mayor James Rolph, former U.S. senator and former mayor James Phelan, and a group of other supporters listed in the article, most of whom did not have Italian surnames. The 1925 election for supervisors turned on Hetch Hetchy water issues. The contention was that supervisors were selling out the public, claiming that the prior board had not taken necessary steps in the previous four years to make sure that the Hetch Hetchy water would be sold through municipal distribution, thereby saving San Francisco citizens substantial money on their water bill.<sup>74</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* also recommended Rossi’s reelection, contending that he was supported by business, fraternal, social, and labor ranks.<sup>75</sup> The strength of the challengers was apparent when the *San Francisco Examiner* reported on October 25, 1925, that “San Francisco Registration Breaks All Records: 34 Entered in Supervisorial Contest.” The *San Francisco Examiner* on October 26, 1925, also opined that the huge registration was seen as an obvious sign of public protest against the so-called mishandling of the Hetch Hetchy water issue.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>74</sup> *San Francisco Daily News*, October 3, 1925.

<sup>75</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 5, 1925.

The *San Francisco Tribune*, an independent weekly publication, noted that Rossi was supported by not only the Italian community but also others. Still, Rossi acknowledged that he had been made a target by certain San Francisco newspapers.<sup>76</sup> The *Call Bulletin* also supported the existing supervisors, opining that they had the experience and business ability to meet civic obligations, public utilities, and lowering taxes.<sup>77</sup>

Political advertisements abounded during this election. The San Francisco Retailers and Protective Association urged Rossi's reelection.<sup>78</sup> Mayor Rolph supported Rossi wholeheartedly.<sup>79</sup> Despite this support for Rossi and other incumbent supervisors, the electorate was in a broom-sweeping mode, and all the supervisors were cleaned out of office with the exception of one. Rossi lost by 10,000 votes.<sup>80</sup>

As a strong business advocate and with a conservative Republican background, Rossi was again elected supervisor in 1930. He was considered to be one who could mediate disputes and was influential in breaking the impasse between the City of San Francisco and Ogden Mills over the purchase of what was then Mills Field (now the site of San Francisco International Airport). The *San Francisco Chronicle*'s headline read, "Rossi Moves to Break Down Opposition to Mills Field." The article also quotes Charles Lindbergh as opining that Mills Field would be an excellent landing place.<sup>81</sup>

Rossi's conservative business philosophy was demonstrated in his oft-repeated

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<sup>76</sup> *San Francisco Tribune*, October 16, 1925.

<sup>77</sup> *Call Bulletin*, October 17, 1925.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, October 25, 1925.

<sup>79</sup> *Call Bulletin*, October 26, 1925.

<sup>80</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 4, 1925; *Call Bulletin*, November 4, 1925.

<sup>81</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 28, 1930.

pledge to reduce taxes and balance the budget. This philosophy was moderated, however, by a call for relief for the unemployed.

Rossi's political mentor, James Rolph, ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1918.<sup>82</sup> Rolph decided to run for governor again in 1930. Of course, the concern was whether he would have statewide support. Rolph had traveled the state in 1928, however, supporting Hoover for president, and had a broad political base. He was even supported by the Los Angeles newspapers.<sup>83</sup> California was overwhelmingly Republican, so the real contest was whether Rolph could win the primary against the incumbent governor, C. Young. Rolph was the epitome of the patriotic leader who exhibited great charisma and a great ability to capitalize on radio, newsreels, newspapers, and public appearances.<sup>84</sup> Rolph was a showman in the Jimmy Walker style and even dressed in various costumes at campaign events. According to one of his campaign managers, he would travel with five costumes, one for an aviator, a dairy worker, a miner, a cowboy, and a Spanish don.<sup>85</sup> Incredibly, Rolph reached across party lines. He had won the Democratic primary for governor in 1918.<sup>86</sup> Rolph had been the longest-running mayor in San Francisco history. His public persona was one of a father who attended numerous events and presided over the city as though it were his exclusive domain.

Rolph won the primary and then, ultimately, the 1930 election. His overwhelming victory prompted Will Rogers to quip, "Thank goodness we won't be

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<sup>82</sup> James Worthen, *Governor James Rolph and the Great Depression in California* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), p. 89.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

reforming during this administration, at least.”<sup>87</sup> When Rolph moved on to the State Capitol, many Californians at the time did not see the so-called Great Depression as one that was serious or that would last any length of time.<sup>88</sup> For example, the failure rate of California banks was 8 percent as compared to the national average of 36 percent in October 1929. Rolph nominated Rossi to fill the remainder of his term in San Francisco, and Rossi was elected by the board of supervisors in December of 1930.<sup>89</sup> Despite the optimism of the City of San Francisco, signs of fiscal problems began to surface almost immediately. An alarming *San Francisco News* headline stated, “\$1,000,000 Deficit Faces City for 1931—Mayor-Elect Rossi Issues Warning to Slash Municipal Expenses—\$150,000 Job Aid Lost—Appropriation of \$450,000 for Water Department Cuts Funds.”<sup>90</sup> Rossi was also faced with charges that he was the tool of Rolph. One paper opined that Rolph had been elected five times, but “Rossi’s unfortunate introduction to office as a mere holding tenant is not calculated to picture official longevity.”<sup>91</sup>

The early Depression approach to welfare and unemployment in San Francisco was self sufficiency. In January of 1931, Rossi named twenty-five prominent business leaders, both men and women, to sponsor an aggressive campaign for \$2.5 million in an improvement and job relief bond. Business leaders supported this program for both public improvements and for “the welfare of the unemployed.”<sup>92</sup> The prevailing view was that the Depression would soon be over and that this program would not need to be

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>89</sup> *Call Bulletin*, December 22, 1930.

<sup>90</sup> *San Francisco News*, December 30, 1930.

<sup>91</sup> *San Francisco Argonaut*, January 3, 1931.

<sup>92</sup> *San Francisco News*, January 10, 1931.

in existence for any lengthy period. In fact, the headline in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in January of 1931 stated, "Rossi Foresees Early Return to Prosperity." In February of 1931, the relief bond bill was passed, and it was hailed as a vote to stop the jobless problem. Rossi was quoted as saying, "We have demonstrated to the rest of the country a practical and humanitarian way of dealing with the serious unemployment crisis."<sup>93</sup> There was no hint in the press at the time that any federal help was necessary for relief. When the Shriners came to town in March of 1931, the grand potentate stated, "The Depression is over. Only the memory of it is retarding business."<sup>94</sup>

By June of 1931, however, many of the big-city mayors, including Rossi, were urging President Hoover to call an extra session of Congress to act on the so-called Hearst Plan for great public works legislation. Rossi was quoted as saying, "Improvements are called to be a capital investment by the people of the United States for the benefit of the present and future generation of American citizens."<sup>95</sup> By August of 1931, acute unemployment problems were facing the citizens of San Francisco. Rossi contended that taxes must be raised \$2 million to provide for public work during the coming winter. This was necessary because the \$2.5 million bond issue had already been utilized.<sup>96</sup> The *San Francisco News* noted Rossi's support of Hoover calling a special session of Congress to levy a temporary tax on large incomes to finance a national relief program.<sup>97</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* reported in August of 1931 that various civic leaders were starting their own campaign to create \$2 million in emergency relief. The

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<sup>93</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, February 7, 1931.

<sup>94</sup> *San Francisco News*, March 16, 1931.

<sup>95</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, August 20, 1931.

<sup>96</sup> *San Francisco News*, August 8, 1931.

committee included many noteworthy business people, such as Colbert Coldwell, president of the San Francisco Real Estate Board and predecessor to Coldwell Banker Real Estate. William H. Crocker Allen was called for federal help.

These actions coincided with Rossi's decision to declare himself a candidate for the 1932 election for a first full term as elected mayor. The August 12<sup>th</sup> *San Francisco News* reprinted a letter Rossi penned to President Hoover asking for help during the coming winter for relief of the unemployed. He stated, "San Francisco has performed its duty during the past eighteen months towards helping the needy, and in the honor of our city, it could be stated that no one has gone hungry here." Rossi went on to say that during the previous winter, the problem was unemployment; in the coming winter, there would be "abject hunger unless prompt provision is made." He further opined that San Francisco's situation was not different from that of other large cities. Rossi was a Hoover supporter; Rossi was a Republican; Rossi was pro-business. As the Depression wore on, however, he discerned the fact that relief could not be provided on a merely local level. The extent of his support for Hoover's special session was a noteworthy break from local relief efforts. The *San Francisco Examiner* on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August quite emphatically stated, "Even Mayor Rossi Joins the Crusade for Extra Session of Congress," yet editorials before the election opined that Rossi was conservative, dignified, and reliable.<sup>98</sup>

Rossi won the election by a mere 7,000 votes and was elected for his first full term of mayor for the period of 1932 through 1936. Even the *New York Times* praised Rossi for being a diligent and conscientious public servant and a more effective mayor

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, August 11, 1931.

than believed possible under the old “feeble” charter.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *California Journal*, October 31, 1931; *San Francisco Examiner*, October 31, 1931.

<sup>99</sup> *New York Times*, October 8, 1931.



#### IV. EMBRACING A NEW DEAL FOR CITIES

The public persona of an elected mayor of a major urban center is demonstrated in many ways. However, one of the most important in forging a special relationship between the mayor and the citizens of the city is to project an image of “first citizen.” The mayors of the time had varying degrees of personal charisma. As the hand-picked successor to Rolph, Rossi had never faced an election for mayor. He was viewed as not having the outward charisma and style of a Rolph, who was often portrayed as the West Coast version of New York mayor Jimmy Walker. Given Rolph’s popularity and style, he would meet and greet almost anyone who visited San Francisco, and his extreme popularity led to his election as governor.

Rossi as a conservative businessman wanted to restore financial order to the city, yet as the New Deal progressed, he wanted to project a façade of strength, leadership, and stability and develop popularity by embracing New Deal programs. It is relevant to note that Rossi was first elected by the Board of Supervisors and reelected three times thereafter with, initially, no endorsements from labor. Some stated, “In office, Rossi quickly established himself as a carbon copy of his predecessor—always nattily dressed, with a fresh boutonniere, an inveterate booster of San Francisco, but more constitutional monarch than a prime minister.”<sup>100</sup> This is particularly remarkable in that the union membership in San Francisco almost doubled between 1933 and 1940 and the city electorate became overwhelmingly Democratic upon the election of Roosevelt. Still, the

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<sup>100</sup> William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 198.

city elected and reelected a conservative businessman with few pro-union ties and received union criticism during the 1934-1935 dock strikes and for the martial law that resulted.<sup>101</sup>

The newspaper clippings from the time demonstrate that as Rossi embraced New Deal programs, he was cited more and more frequently in local and national publications. The number of public appearances cited in the press between 1931 and 1940 increased substantially over the period, as did press clippings related to city-federal New Deal relationships. These clippings also demonstrate an association between paternalism and print publicity on an ever-increasing level.

Was there a relationship between paternalism and print publicity? More importantly, did this relationship enable a mayor to be elected and reelected during the Depression? This paternalistic approach is grounded in leadership style and the fact that leadership style is situational. Given the fact that cities exhibited a great deal of political fragmentation and domination by various interest groups, mayors had little inherent power.<sup>102</sup> Mayors realized the success of Roosevelt early on. As one author stated, “The Democratic magic of Roosevelt’s first year in office permeated Pittsburgh politics during 1933.”<sup>103</sup> This was as true in San Francisco as in Pittsburgh and as in New York.

LaGuardia’s success also was dependent on his public relations skills. He used his personal popularity, and, as one author put it, he used it as “a weapon to counter

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>102</sup> Flanagan, *Mayors*, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> Bruce M. Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah: Pittsburgh Machine Politics* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1970), p. 53.

adversaries.”<sup>104</sup> Rossi and other mayors’ success in developing a paternalistic style was dependent on various factors.

The first factor was the Depression itself—the fear, uncertainty, and lack of funds as well as high unemployment provided little safe harbor for the populace. They turned to their mayors as they turned to their president if the mayors were able to demonstrate abilities and energies similar to FDR’s.

Second, the nation turned to Roosevelt as a visible father figure who would help with new programs and direct aid. He would lead the country out of the Depression, and one way he did it was to forge an allegiance with the mayors through the vehicle of the United States Conference of Mayors. This relationship was symbiotic—the mayors towards Roosevelt, Roosevelt towards the mayors, both helping each other from a political as well as economic standpoint.

The result of these factors did cause mayors to emulate FDR and caused them to work with the federal government and match his leadership role. If mayors wanted to be elected and reelected, not only did they have to take advantage of federal programs and embrace them in an unprecedented way, but they also had to publicize their efforts in ways previously not utilized. The print media being all-important during this era, it was necessary for politicians such as Rossi to make proclamations, announcements, and predictions that would engender positive publicity related to both the local and the federal level.

The 1933 election for mayor in Pittsburgh was an example of a Democrat

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<sup>104</sup> Flanagan, *Mayors*, p. 163

embracing New Deal philosophy. William Nissley McNair was elected mayor on the Democratic ticket by aligning himself with Roosevelt. It was reported that wherever there was a photograph of McNair, there was also one of Roosevelt. His political advertisements stated that votes for him would also be votes for Roosevelt.<sup>105</sup> At one of his campaign rallies, he stated, “I am as confident of becoming the next Mayor of Pittsburgh as I am that F.D.R. will pull this country out of the depression before many months have elapsed.”<sup>106</sup>

Mayors could not help but see this paternalistic approach building as FDR’s presidency progressed, and if they wanted to be reelected, they realized that they should take advantage of his style and popularity on a local level. One way to do that, whether a mayor was a liberal Democrat or a conservative Republican, was to take advantage of federal programs and embrace them in a way that told the populace that the mayor had ties to those in power in Washington, D.C. The mayor could then deliver federal funds for local purposes. This local-federal relationship could be real or imagined, but, in either event, it had to be publicized for the mayor to gain popular support locally. The print media being all important during this era, it was necessary for politicians such as Rossi to make proclamations, announcements, and predictions that would engender positive publicity related to federal-city money and relationships on an ever-increasing basis.

The over 20,000 newspaper articles in the clippings file clearly document that in Rossi’s years as mayor, one category stands out—those articles demonstrating Rossi’s

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<sup>105</sup> Stave, p. 61.

public persona during each year of his mayoralty. Even as early as 1931, before the New Deal even existed, Rossi's presence is noted in 480 newspaper accounts. Rossi attended the Rose Bowl Parade,<sup>107</sup> welcomed Albert Einstein to San Francisco,<sup>108</sup> greeted an Italian liner on its maiden voyage,<sup>109</sup> met Admiral Byrd,<sup>110</sup> celebrated his birthday,<sup>111</sup> outlined plans for the Golden Gate Bridge,<sup>112</sup> launched ship-building projects,<sup>113</sup> named the newly constructed light cruiser *The San Francisco*,<sup>114</sup> greeted the Shriners,<sup>115</sup> and welcomed "the two Jims" ("Sunny Jim" Rolph as governor and "Broadway Jim," James Walker, mayor of New York).<sup>116</sup> Even such minor events as Rossi being kept home with a cold (*San Francisco Examiner*, April 11, 1931) and his still being ill (*San Francisco News*, April 13, 1931) were reported. He welcomed the Prince and Princess of Japan along with other dignitaries.<sup>117</sup> He was even pictured with former President Calvin Coolidge, who visited the city in November 1931 (*San Francisco Examiner*, November 3, 1931). Rossi's name appeared in print a total of 1,104 times in the newspaper sources analyzed from the year 1931. The publicity awarded Rossi's activities and the public persona developed through these events created a positive image.

The Appendix shows the newspapers in which Rossi's name appeared among more than 20,000 articles analyzed. The morning and evening newspapers were

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Pasadena Post*, January 1, 1931.

<sup>108</sup> *San Francisco Jewish Journal*, January 7, 1931.

<sup>109</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, January 9, 1931.

<sup>110</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 15, 1931.

<sup>111</sup> Articles protesting the celebration appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner*, January 23, 1931.

<sup>112</sup> *San Francisco News*, January 28, 1931.

<sup>113</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 12, 1931.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, February 21, 1931.

<sup>115</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, March 16, 1931.

<sup>116</sup> *San Francisco News*, March 25, 1931.

pervasive in their influence on San Franciscans. The images portrayed in the newspapers, whether via photographs or articles, molded public opinion in a much more comprehensive manner than they do today. There were four major newspapers in San Francisco during the Depression era: the *Call Bulletin* (a Hearst paper), the *San Francisco Examiner* (also a Hearst paper, with the highest circulation rate of all), the *San Francisco Chronicle* (owned by the Youngs, who were a long-time, traditional, elite San Francisco family; the *Chronicle* was also a major newspaper), and finally the *San Francisco News* (a Scripps-Howard paper at the time). Rossi's name appeared in these publications numerous times, as the Appendix indicates. His name also appeared in other San Francisco weeklies and area newspapers such as the *Sunset Dispatch*, the *Recorder*, the *Twin Peaks Sentinel*, and the *South of Market Journal*, to name a few. Given the fact that newspapers and radio were the primary sources of information at the time, the importance of the press cannot be over-emphasized, especially during hard times. In 1931, however, Rossi had not fully realized the importance of paternalism.

By 1932, however, the Depression had deepened, and in the early months, Rossi cut \$1.5 million in city costs and cut salaries of city employees. He was seeking ways to avoid huge deficits by reducing city payrolls.<sup>118</sup> By March, it was obvious that prosperity was indeed not around the corner. Finally, Rossi—perhaps reluctantly—came to the conclusion that the federal government must step in with a “definite and tangible program of relief.”<sup>119</sup> At a local conference of city officials, he stated, “In this peacetime crisis,

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<sup>117</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, May 23, 1931.

<sup>118</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 27, 1932; *San Francisco News*, February 18, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner*, February 19, 1932.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

the nation must organize its men with picks and shovels as it does in time of war with guns and bayonets.” Rossi was further of the opinion that the cities had done what they could and that the states had also utilized their resources. He advocated for “an enormous program of public works such as highway construction and reforestation to provide jobs.”<sup>120</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* also reported that unless something was done to relieve the unemployment situation, there would be families starving that winter. The article elaborated that 30,000 people had been receiving minimal aid, such as groceries and living assistance; this assistance would also stop.

Until the Depression, mayors were largely uninvolved with the federal government’s funding of local projects. Relief was not part of the national agenda. In fact, prior to 1932, there was no organization of cities or mayors to interface with the federal government. The continued Depression caused both Republican and Democratic mayors alike to rethink federal-city relations.

As a turnaround seemed a remote possibility, and as the unemployment position worsened, Mayor Frank Murphy of Detroit called for a Conference of Mayors in June of 1932. The meeting was called in a letter from Murphy to all major city mayors to address urgent problems that would face the cities during the winter of 1932-1933. The meeting was to be attended primarily by Democrats, and Rossi declined the invitation: “The mayor announced yesterday that he had seriously considered Murphy’s invitation but because of urgent City business finally declined.”<sup>121</sup> It is no coincidence that on June 10, 1932, Rossi is shown with other Republican delegates leaving for the Republican

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<sup>120</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, March 11, 1932.

convention, stating that he was “pledged to the re-nomination of President Hoover.”<sup>122</sup>

Twenty-nine mayors attended Murphy’s conference. Murphy’s opening statement set forth the purpose of the meeting: “We are met in this deliberative conference to consider a plan for federal relief for the unemployed and to petition Congress to make available to the cities the resources of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for specific purposes only.”<sup>123</sup> Various mayors in attendance reported the state of affairs. The mayor of Cleveland related that there were 150,000 unemployed “walking the streets” and that the relief rolls went from 1,600 in 1929 to 20,000 in 1932. The mayor of Pittsburgh reported that the steel mills were operating only at 25 percent of capacity. The unemployment problem was exacerbated, according to the mayors, by the grim reality that state governments did not have excess revenues and therefore could not help cities with their individual and unique problems. The mayors were concerned to the point where they divulged their fears of riots and even revolution.<sup>124</sup>

Property taxes constituted the great majority of municipal revenues, and with property values declining, cities were hard pressed to meet financial needs.<sup>125</sup> San Francisco, however, was one of the few cities that operated on a strict balanced budget and was considered a model for other cities to emulate.

After the first Conference of Mayors concluded, seven mayors with an “uncomfortable Democratic tinge” went to Washington to lobby the Congress and the

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<sup>121</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 26, 1932.

<sup>122</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, June 10, 1932.

<sup>123</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 23.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>125</sup> Richard M. Flanagan, “Roosevelt, Mayors and the New Deal Regime: The Origins of Intergovernmental Lobbying and Administration,” *Polity*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Spring, 1999): 415.



Hoover administration for aid. They wanted a \$5 billion loan.<sup>126</sup>

The first Conference of Mayors was a significant factor in passing the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932, which came into law in July of that year. The new law allowed Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to make loans or enter contracts for up to \$1.5 billion to finance so-called "self-liquidating" public works in various cities. The Hoover administration, in the traditional Republican mold, would grant aid to businesses, not to individuals. Congress had prevailed on the administration to provide relief directly to cities as opposed to businesses.<sup>127</sup> The Act did not provide any direct relief for the unemployed in that it required self-liquidating projects that had to be financially solvent. It also required that the construction costs would be returned over a period of years by various fees, tolls, or other charges. One historian opined that such projects were almost nonexistent.<sup>128</sup> In September of 1932, Mayor Curley of Boston, an active supporter of the Conference of Mayors, was shown in the *San Francisco Examiner* arriving in San Francisco to be greeted by Mayor Rossi for undisclosed purposes. In the same month, Rossi greeted Governor Roosevelt on a campaign tour through the city. However, as election day approached, local newspapers ran banner headlines and pictures of Hoover being greeted by Rossi and being escorted by Rossi and Rolph throughout the city. The *San Francisco Examiner* front page of November 9, 1932, shows Hoover, Governor Rolph, Mayor Rossi, and their wives in a huge welcoming ceremony.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 50.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>129</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, September 14, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner*, September 23, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner*, November 5, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner*, November 7, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner*, November 8, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner*, November 9, 1932.

In between Roosevelt's election and his inauguration, most mayors continued to seek local funds for relief. For instance, in November of 1932, the community chest was seeking voluntary pledges to help the unemployed. Various businesses, including Pacific Telephone and Fireman's Fund contributed to the fund.<sup>130</sup>

In 1932, newspapers indicate that Rossi attended 194 persona-polishing events, from revering Father Junipero Serra,<sup>131</sup> welcoming the ship *Empress of Britain* in March, mourning of the theft of the city's tulips in the *Call Bulletin* in March, taking a ride in the blimp *Akron* over San Francisco,<sup>132</sup> dedicating the War Memorial Opera House in September, and attending the parade in honor of President Hoover.<sup>133</sup> In light of the greater number of public-persona articles in later years, it is obvious that Rossi had not yet realized the importance of attending as many events as possible and receiving the commensurate news coverage for such appearances. Perhaps Rossi thought the Depression had run its course. The total number of articles mentioning Rossi in 1932 is only 558.

Early in the Depression decade, San Francisco took advantage of selling relief bonds, and in 1933, the city sold over \$2 million in relief bonds pursuant to the Emergency Relief Construction Act.<sup>134</sup> Rossi continued to articulate fiscal conservatism, stating that the tax burden must be lessened and that the budget must be balanced.<sup>135</sup>

The projection was that 1933 would be a better year. An editorial in the *San*

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<sup>130</sup> *San Francisco News*, November 18, 1932.

<sup>131</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 2, 1932.

<sup>132</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, May 14, 1932.

<sup>133</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 7, 1932.

<sup>134</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, January 10, 1933.

<sup>135</sup> *San Francisco News*, January 10, 1933; *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 9, 1933.

*San Francisco News* in January 1933 opined that “San Francisco has come through the Depression thus far with a municipal record that is the envy of other cities. But we are not yet out of the woods.”<sup>136</sup> There was still a prevailing view that by cutting costs, balancing the budget, and taking voluntary contributions, the city would pull through. In fact, city workers, after meeting with Rossi, even agreed to a pay reduction.<sup>137</sup> Yet various public facilities were soon closed, such as the War Memorial Opera House and various libraries.<sup>138</sup> The incredible generosity of city employees was the issue in early 1933 as well. They agreed that 12 percent of their salaries could go into a fund for the unemployed. An editorial in the *Chronicle* opined that there were 13,000 families on relief with 60,000 persons in need of help. But city employees objected to further reductions in their salaries unless other groups helped. Interestingly, the editorial advised “this present Depression has lasted three years and one half. By all precedent, the business cycle is due for a sharp upswing during the next twelve months.” Again, there was no demand for federal aid, federal relief, or even state relief. San Francisco, however, continued to be one of the few cities that was living on a pay-as-you-go basis.<sup>139</sup> The stories of voluntary pay cuts were reported in newspapers outside California, including the *Salt Lake City Tribune* on February 12, 1933.

As the second Conference of Mayors was about to convene, a short article disclosed that Rossi again declined to go to the Detroit mayors’ conference.<sup>140</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* opined on the same date that San Francisco was solvent, so Rossi

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<sup>136</sup> *San Francisco News*, January 11, 1933.

<sup>137</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, January 13, 1933; *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 13, 1933.

<sup>138</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 21, 1933; *San Francisco News*, January 23, 1933.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, February 8, 1933.

did not need to go to the meeting of mayors. Rossi's letter to the mayors essentially said that San Francisco was in no dire straits and that it was in a "most fortunate position and faces no emergency." Rossi had not yet come to the realization that there was a new city-federal New Deal relationship in the making. The article did note that the city had applied for RFC loans at low interest rates. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, however, ran a detailed and positive article promoting the second Conference of Mayors. It explained that Mayor Murphy was leading ninety-five cities in an effort to obtain direct relief from the federal government. It further reported that the mayors of twenty cities had accepted the invitation to a meeting with the new administration in Washington. The publicity given the second Conference of Mayors did not go unnoticed. A few days later, Rossi sent two telegrams, one to Mayor Cermak of Chicago and one to President Roosevelt, rejoicing in Roosevelt's escape from an assassin's bullet and hoping for a speedy recovery for Cermak, who was the unintended victim.<sup>141</sup> Rossi again wrote to Roosevelt in March of 1933, stating how impressed he was with his "inspirational inaugural message." He appreciated Roosevelt "submerging your party politics."<sup>142</sup> Rossi was beginning to realize the potential and power of New Deal policies and the Roosevelt presidency.

The Conference of Mayors took place on February 17, 1933. It was preceded by a special message from Mayor Murphy mailed to all the large-city mayors, encouraging their personal attendance and citing that "serious conditions demand that we do

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<sup>140</sup> *San Francisco News*, February 15, 1933.

<sup>141</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, February 17, 1933.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, March 5, 1933; *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 5, 1933.

something.”<sup>143</sup> However, it was noted that “such municipal stalwarts as Rossi of San Francisco and Baker of Portland” were not in attendance.<sup>144</sup> O’Brien of New York declared, “We are going to do our own financing in this city.”<sup>145</sup> The majority of mayors were of the opinion that there was a need for the federal government to act quickly and act in a manner that would help the unemployed immediately. Murphy opened the conference by relating what he saw as four root causes of the cities’ situation, the first being the growth of municipal debt, the second being tax delinquencies, the third being the welfare relief burden being put on cities, and the fourth being the inability of cities to raise taxes. The mayors in attendance agreed that due to the gravity of the situation, the United States Conference of Mayors should be established as a permanent legal body.<sup>146</sup> The official proclamation stated that it was formed to promote the political agenda of large urban centers. There was now an official organization to lobby for the cities. It would remain on the cutting edge of large cities’ economic, social, and political advocacy to the federal government.

The day after President Roosevelt’s inaugural address, Rossi asked first Governor Rolph and then the federal government for relief for the unemployed. San Francisco was spending \$600,000 per month on relief for the unemployed. Available cash had run out because of the failure to sell bonds, and federal help was needed.<sup>147</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* reported that Rossi was asking the federal government for relief in the same

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<sup>143</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 58.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>147</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 5, 1933.

manner as Los Angeles.<sup>148</sup> Again, almost apologetically, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the board of supervisors had realized the need for cash and in March of 1933 had authorized Rossi to appeal for a \$3 million loan from the RFC to help with San Francisco's unemployment.<sup>149</sup>

Roosevelt's New Deal policies received early approval from the local press. Editorials praised his first steps as president, including his direct federal financial aid to cities.<sup>150</sup> Rossi echoed the sentiment of the local newspapers when he proclaimed that "our people owe a debt of deep gratitude to President Roosevelt for his extraordinary accomplishment for our welfare as a nation."<sup>151</sup> Meanwhile, local relief was dealt another blow in April of 1933, when the State Assembly passed a bill that would provide for a 60-day moratorium to fund state tax payments to city governments.<sup>152</sup>

One of the first New Deal measures to become law was the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, approved on June 16, 1933, which created the Public Works Administration (PWA). The public works provisions of the NIRA did allow some immediate relief.<sup>153</sup> Harold Ickes, the secretary of the Interior, was placed in charge of the PWA. Unfortunately, as described by one historian, he was "a self-described curmudgeon[;] Ickes trusted no one and was very tightfisted with the public's money."<sup>154</sup> Most unemployed—those on the dole, unable to find jobs—were not helped by the PWA. It was not a direct-relief program. Roosevelt, Hopkins, Ickes, and most of the population

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<sup>148</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, March 5, 1933.

<sup>149</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 7, 1933; *San Francisco News*, March 7, 1933.

<sup>150</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, April 12, 1933.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, April 17, 1933.

<sup>152</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 13, 1933.

<sup>153</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 78.

were opposed to a direct-relief program at the beginning of the Depression in any event. Distrust and dislike of those on the dole was still the prevalent view during the early years of the Depression.<sup>155</sup> Americans did not take well to anyone out of work.<sup>156</sup> President Roosevelt realized the importance of putting people to work, and therefore, according to one author, he was “intimately involved in the day-to-day policies of the PWA, since it was he whom Congress had made the final judge of all projects submitted for approval by the states and localities.”<sup>157</sup>

Secretary Ickes’ management style created a PWA bureaucracy that was mired in red tape and cumbersome, to say the least, in evaluating city applications. The red tape was said to be daunting. Furthermore, Ickes wanted projects to be useful for the community and did not care about so-called “make-work” projects. His efficiency was certainly not productive when it came to putting people to work immediately in a time of crisis.<sup>158</sup> As the Depression continued, public attitudes changed. Months without paychecks, continued unemployment, bank failures, and foreclosures took their toll on the American psyche, and the fact that “PWA projects took months to get off the drawing boards” meant a continued lack of immediate relief to the unemployed.”<sup>159</sup>

By late 1933, Roosevelt’s attitude seemed to change, too, with a realization that direct federal relief would be necessary. In that year, Congress created the position of the Federal Relief Administrator, who worked under the Federal Relief Administration

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<sup>154</sup> McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, p.152.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>156</sup> Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*, p. 4.

<sup>157</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 79.

<sup>158</sup> McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, p.153.

<sup>159</sup> Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*, p.23.

(FERA).<sup>160</sup> Harry Hopkins was Roosevelt's choice as the administrator. Hopkins was described by some as the "assistant President."<sup>161</sup> Hopkins immediately primed the pump to get the economy moving.<sup>162</sup> But FERA grants went to states, not cities, and this did not provide immediate relief, although it helped states repay loans and provided some direct aid for the unemployed.<sup>163</sup>

San Francisco's political and business leaders, by mid-year 1933, agreed to a \$16 million program for self-liquidating improvements through the use of the PWA. Self-liquidating improvements were those that would eventually pay for themselves by such measures as bridge tolls, entrance fees, and other methods of payment. The prevailing notion was that 100 percent of the improvements would be paid for by the federal government.<sup>164</sup> Rossi was assured by Washington that millions would be made available in federal relief. In fact Roosevelt telegraphed Rossi to tell him that \$3 billion was immediately available and to get going and start spending money.<sup>165</sup> Headlines in the local papers proclaimed that hundreds of millions of dollars would be made available to San Francisco for city projects. Rossi was prominently mentioned in all of these articles. He was credited for his willingness and ability to seek and obtain PWA programs. The PWA functioned in what now seems an ordinary way, but at the time it was extraordinary—namely, that the federal government would purchase city bonds at a low interest rate and further advance 30 percent of the costs of all non-self-liquidating

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<sup>160</sup> McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, p.151.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>163</sup> Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*, p. 24.

<sup>164</sup> *San Francisco News*, June 9, 1933; *San Francisco Examiner*, June 9, 1933.

<sup>165</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 13, 1933.



projects and 100 percent by way of outright gifts to projects that were 100 percent self-liquidating.<sup>166</sup>

In the changing world of urban-federal relationships, Rossi wanted to be on the cutting edge economically, socially, and politically. By mid-1933, he realized that the New Deal had profoundly affected the equilibrium between the federal government and cities. He therefore wanted to appear not only able to obtain federal funds but also as an insider, that he had a direct relationship with those on the Washington scene. The *San Francisco Examiner* on June 20, 1933, quoted him as saying “I have learned from unofficial sources in Washington that California’s share of the \$3,300,000,000 fund will be from \$160,000,000 to \$200,000,000.” This was exciting news to the citizens of San Francisco, and by the end of the month, Rossi was proposing a special election for a \$20 million bond issue.<sup>167</sup> To further capitalize on that excitement, Rossi appointed a committee of twenty-five citizens to decide how the federal money would be spent, even though a bond issue had not even passed.<sup>168</sup> There was still some reluctance in certain quarters regarding accepting federal money, however. A *San Francisco News* editorial on July 6, 1933, asked, “Will San Francisco Play Ball?” The editorial went on, ironically, to wonder, can anyone on a twenty-five-person board advise how to spend \$104 million worth of tentative projects recommended by the mayor?<sup>169</sup> For the rest of that summer, the political buzz in San Francisco was how to spend such huge sums of money. Finally, on July 24, 1933, approval was given to use the money for the

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<sup>166</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, June 20, 1933.

<sup>167</sup> *San Francisco News*, June 20, 1933.

<sup>168</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 1, 1933.

<sup>169</sup> *San Francisco News*, July 6, 1933.

completion of the Hetch Hetchy project.<sup>170</sup> The continued coverage of federal projects kept the excitement high about the prospects for an end to the economic disasters that had occurred in 1932 and 1933.

Rossi was again invited to attend the Conference of Mayors, which was to take place in Chicago on September 22, 1933. Perhaps to pique his interest, he was asked to provide the initial address. Given the continuing editorials and articles urging action on federal projects, it is no surprise that the venue of the Conference of Mayors would prove to be a dynamic locus of change.<sup>171</sup> Incredibly, Rossi did not immediately accept the invitation, and on September 2, 1933, the *San Francisco News* reported that Rossi was considering accepting the invitation and urged him to attend, as his address would be broadcast nationwide and it would provide nationwide publicity for San Francisco and, of course, its mayor.

While Rossi's invitation was pending, the local newspapers continued to report and editorialize about the importance of a bond election and whether Hetch Hetchy should be publicly owned as a municipal distribution system as opposed to being operated and managed by Pacific Gas & Electric. Rossi was demanding immediate action by the supervisors to obtain funding for Hetch Hetchy's distribution system so that the city could ultimately own not just the system but also the means of distribution, which later proved to be a major stumbling block to PWA funding.<sup>172</sup>

Given what had taken place in Pittsburgh and what was taking place in New

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, July 24, 1933; *San Francisco Examiner*, July 24, 1933; *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 24, 1933.

<sup>171</sup> *San Francisco News*, August 18, 1933.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, September 11, 1933.

York, it was really no surprise when Rossi accepted the invitation to the Conference of Mayors. The *San Francisco Chronicle* on September 12, 1933, reported that he would be delivering one of the three addresses before the conference, the other speakers being no less than President Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Ickes. The newspaper reported that the details of Rossi's acceptance were released to the paper by Rossi's secretary—obviously, there was an intent to develop publicity and his public persona by Rossi's final acceptance of the invitation to the Conference of Mayors. He probably realized, as LaGuardia did, that to build a reputation, it would be necessary to have a relationship with Washington. As Flanagan put it with regard to LaGuardia, "His legendary reputation could not have been built without another city, Washington, D.C., and an entirely different political order defined by President Roosevelt, and a nationally orientated New Deal ideology rather than the orthodoxy of a more conservative local Democratic regulars."<sup>173</sup>

Rossi's first trip to the Conference of Mayors was given wide publicity. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on his boarding a train for the Chicago meeting and again repeated that he would be the keynote speaker. The *San Francisco News* in its September 18, 1933 article even reported the intimate details of the trip itself. The plethora of publicity in connection with Rossi's speech and his obtaining federal funding cannot be overstated.

The importance of the United States Conference of Mayors as a new urban-federal connection was clear, and by the September 1933 Conference, "they [the mayors]

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<sup>173</sup> Flanagan, *Mayors*, p. 154.

could rightfully consider themselves in the center of a virtual revolution by law that had opened with the bank holiday of 5 March 1933 and now with the march of the army of alphabet soup agencies out into the hinterland was entering a time of testing and trial.”<sup>174</sup> The mayors now wanted solid information from both Hopkins and Ickes, who were in attendance, as to what relief would be provided by the federal government. The mayors were concerned about economic and social volatility given the fast-approaching winter of 1933-1934.

The United States Conference of Mayors published bound editions of each meeting. They were edited by its chief executive officer, Paul Betters. Included in the 1933 volume are all the speeches, including Harry Hopkins’. Hopkins’ speech is noteworthy in its candid and direct approach. He acknowledged that “you fellows are on the spot in this relief business as nobody else in the United States.” Hopkins wanted to talk about relief, not federal projects. He did not care if the projects were self-liquidating, financed, or non-self-liquidating. He stated there were “4,800,000 families on relief last March and February ... if you multiplied the 4,800,000 families by 4.4, you get 20 million people who were getting public relief last winter.”<sup>175</sup> He further opined that the number of families on relief had gone down to 3.2 million by the end of August, but that was still 15 million people. Hopkins tried to dissuade the mayors of any thought that those on relief were “tramps, hoboes, or the unemployables.”<sup>176</sup> He was of the strong conviction that they were hardworking, upstanding people who had “gone overboard and

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<sup>174</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 81.

<sup>175</sup> Paul V. Betters, ed., *City Problems of 1933: The Annual Proceedings of The United States Conference of Mayors* (Chicago: The United States Conference of Mayors, 1933), p. 81.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

got caught in this relief structure of ours.” He candidly observed that work relief had “a bad name in a number of cities.”<sup>177</sup> He emphasized his thesis that it was the responsibility of the federal government to take care of unemployed citizens and that it would be impossible for them to go through the upcoming winter without some immediate relief.

Harold Ickes took another approach and a rather defensive view that the federal government was ready to fund PWA projects expeditiously. He tried to blame the cities for not moving fast enough. He suggested, “We cannot force you to move any faster than you are willing to move. All we can do is ask you to get on your marks, get set, go. You will have to run the race.”<sup>178</sup> Perhaps disingenuously, he stated that the public works program had approximately \$1.75 billion for state and municipal projects, and the federal government would advance 70 percent of the costs on approval of security, “and by approval of security, I don’t mean to be as finicky about the security that you may offer as would be the investment bankers with whom you are accustomed to deal.”<sup>179</sup> However, his prevailing view tended to be that the projects had to be desirable public works such as water works, sewage, bridges, public buildings, roads, and new schools. He stated that his administration was “not wound up about red tape.”<sup>180</sup>

Mayor Curley of Boston, a favorite of Roosevelt’s, opened the conference. He reaffirmed that the U.S. Conference of Mayors was established for the specific purpose of “considering a program through which municipalities of the United States may take full

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

advantage of the public works program of the federal government.”<sup>181</sup>

Rossi spoke on city-county consolidation in San Francisco and how San Francisco had maintained municipal solvency. He discussed the new municipal charter and the fact that the board of supervisors could not dictate or interfere with his appointments. He was proud of San Francisco and its achievement in being one of the cities with the lowest tax delinquency—only 5.3 percent as of 1932-1933, which was considered outstanding.<sup>182</sup>

Roosevelt sent a personal message but did not attend. He again emphasized that Congress had appropriated \$3 billion and that state and municipal interests in public works projects should be put forward as soon as possible.<sup>183</sup>

The September 1933 Conference of Mayors was a seminal event in city-federal relations. Although Roosevelt had campaigned with an eye toward social reform to some, to others he preached fiscal conservatism and a balanced budget. He had received support from multiple segments and there was an emerging ideological basis for the New Deal, as clearly articulated by Ickes and Hopkins.<sup>184</sup> This third Conference of Mayors was also a seminal event in Rossi’s view of federal-city relationships, and he had the benefit of observing firsthand the relationship between the mayors and the New Deal relief administrators.

Although Rossi had declined invitations to the first two conferences, he realized that Roosevelt’s emerging New Deal philosophy would work, and he was “willing to

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>184</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 89.

engage in pragmatic experimentation.”<sup>185</sup> The conservative Republican business culture and the *laissez faire* business practices of the twenties did not snap the country out of its economic catastrophe. Even Ickes declared that relief was a “bloodless revolution.”<sup>186</sup>

There was a definite change in the air. The Depression had brought forth new political and ideological remedies for social ills. Some sort of permanent federal social welfare to aid cities on an ongoing basis was now surfacing. Ickes even made an allusion to slavery in the pre-Civil War United States:

If Lincoln were alive today, he would still say “we cannot exist half slave and half free.” But he would not mean physical slavery. Perhaps in his wisdom he did not mean physical slavery altogether when he made that memorable utterance. This saying, or his, is just as true now as it was when he gave it expression, except that slavery today is defined in different terms. We are all living in an intolerable economic slavery. If “with bursting granaries on the farms and more hogs than the owners know what to do with,” people are starving; if, with our great quantities of steel plants and rich mines of ore and forests full of lumber, people are without shelter; if, with textile and woolen mills and shoe factories notwithstanding the abundance of raw materials to be turned into clothing, people are insufficiently clad ... we cannot solve them by a policy of *laissez faire*, nor can we solve them under a doctrine of “rugged individualism,” which to me means precisely the same as “the devil take the hindmost.”<sup>187</sup>

Rossi’s speech at this Conference of Mayors was the subject of an incredible amount of press favorable to both him and the city. It started with the *San Francisco Examiner* headline, “Rossi Tells East How SF Cuts Expenses.”<sup>188</sup> The *Examiner* also ran the banner that his national speech was covered by the National Broadcasting Company network and that it could be heard on local radio stations. The *San Francisco Chronicle*

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>187</sup> Betters, *City Problems of 1933*, p. 168.

<sup>188</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, September 22, 1933.

also reported “Rossi Tells 80 Mayors of SF Pay-As-You-Go.”<sup>189</sup> The *Examiner* ran a picture of Mayor Rossi “telling Chicago about the Golden West.”<sup>190</sup> The *San Francisco News* also echoed the Rossi speech in its headline: “Rossi Gives Plans for LA Type of City Limits in Speech.”<sup>191</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported Roosevelt’s invitation to all cities to send their requests for their fair share of the \$3.3 billion in federal public works funds.<sup>192</sup> The *Examiner* even reported “Rossi on Way Home from Mayors’ Meet” and discussed a telegram sent by Rossi to the supervisors to begin work submitting projects for the NIRA public works bond issue.<sup>193</sup> The *San Francisco News* also ran pictures of Rossi and the other California delegates to the mayors’ conference.<sup>194</sup> Rossi was named as a trustee to the Conference of Mayors, and the newspapers reported that as well.<sup>195</sup> The papers also reported that Ickes was calling for mayors to “quit quibbling” and related Ickes’ speech that the mayors should step up and get their share of the federal funding.<sup>196</sup> Mayor Rossi’s radio broadcast was also praised by the local press.<sup>197</sup>

Rossi’s letter, dated September 14, 1933, extolling the virtues of the NIRA was published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The *San Francisco News* also reported that Mayor Rossi’s speech was a great success: “broadcast over a national chain, it was a splendid piece of advertising for San Francisco.”<sup>198</sup> One of the local columnists, Arthur Caylor, reported, “The way Mayor Rossi stole the show at the national Conference of

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<sup>189</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 23, 1933.

<sup>190</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, September 23, 1933.

<sup>191</sup> *San Francisco News*, September 23, 1933.

<sup>192</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 23, 1933.

<sup>193</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, September 27, 1933.

<sup>194</sup> *San Francisco News*, September 25, 1933.

<sup>195</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, September 24, 1933.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*



Mayors in Chicago and gleaned \$1,000,000 worth of publicity money for San Francisco probably will prevent cities from developing intestinal colic over the fact that his jaunt, originally designed to be a one-man item in the expense account, came near to developing junket proportions.”<sup>199</sup> The *Chicago American* showed a picture of Rossi and his wife, entitled “Golden Gate-Keeper.”<sup>200</sup> The *Chicago Daily News* also ran articles on Rossi’s speech.<sup>201</sup>

Even the Chicago papers, including the *Chicago Herald Examiner*, praised the Conference of Mayors in general and Rossi in particular.<sup>202</sup> It also ran an article on “Rossi Was Here to Assail Complicated Tax Problems.”<sup>203</sup> The *Herald Examiner* ran a picture of Rossi, “Here From the West,” and cited the fact that he was a Republican mayor who was attending the conference.<sup>204</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* discussed that San Francisco under the unified city-county setup was debtless, again praising Rossi.<sup>205</sup> The *Chicago Herald Examiner* ran a similar article.<sup>206</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* welcomed Rossi home. The article stated,

Rossi is welcomed with appreciation for the excellent impression he made at the national convention of mayors held in Chicago ... it was a compliment to San Francisco as well as to the merits of its mayor that Mr. Rossi was singled out for the program of speakers at the nationwide gathering. Mr. Rossi’s return deserves

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<sup>197</sup> *San Francisco News*, September 25, 1933.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 26, 1933.

<sup>200</sup> *Chicago American*, September 21, 1933.

<sup>201</sup> A chilling harbinger of things to come was an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on September 28, 1933, reporting that the acting mayor, in Rossi’s absence, withdrew official sanction for the San Francisco German Day celebration because the organizers were displaying the swastika.

<sup>202</sup> *Chicago Herald Examiner*, September 22, 1933.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1933.

<sup>206</sup> *Chicago Herald Examiner*, September 22, 1933

gracious public expression.<sup>207</sup>

Another paper's headline read, "Welcome Home, Mayor Rossi—You Did a Great Job."<sup>208</sup> That article ended with "Mayor Rossi, we thank you for your able advertisement of our San Francisco."<sup>209</sup> Midwestern papers discussed the surplus of San Francisco and the fiscal responsibility of the city under Rossi's guidance. One stated, "Mayor Angelo J. Rossi of San Francisco, whose administration of the last two years has not only turned a deficit of one and one-fourth million dollars into a surplus of approximately 1.2 million but has reduced taxes."<sup>210</sup>

Upon his return, Rossi recommended that the board of supervisors immediately prepare and submit \$35 million in recovery construction programs in a bond election to be held on November 7, 1933.<sup>211</sup> Capitalizing on his prominence, Rossi reported to City Hall that Ickes had assured him that San Francisco's plans for public works would be approved. He went on to say that he was proud to tell other mayors of San Francisco's financial success.<sup>212</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* on September 29, 1933, talked about the "City's triumph"; it discussed how Rossi had done a great service to San Francisco and stated, "It is a small wonder that Mayor Rossi's fellow townsmen plan to give him an enthusiastic reception today." Another picture ran of Rossi returning to the city, explaining his success at the mayors' conference.<sup>213</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* also ran a similar article expressing its gratitude for Rossi's speech and welcoming him back,

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<sup>207</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 29, 1933.

<sup>208</sup> *Call Bulletin*, September 29, 1933.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *Kansas City Times*, September 27, 1933.

<sup>211</sup> *San Francisco News*, September 29, 1933.

<sup>212</sup> *Call Bulletin*, September 29, 1933.

again with a large picture.<sup>214</sup> Rossi was even escorted by a “flag-bedecked fire boat” when the train arrived in Oakland, and he crossed the Bay by ferry.<sup>215</sup>

The *San Francisco News* captured the political ramifications of this third Conference of Mayors. It clearly prophesied Rossi’s change in business structure when it talked about Rossi having been conservative in the past, being influenced by and responsible to business groups in that he was an active member of these groups, but now he “plays square with the people” by now trying to advocate in favor of the NIRA city program. The article went on, “We commend Mayor Rossi for his recognition that the people of San Francisco should be given the opportunity to pass on the NIRA program.”<sup>216</sup> The board of supervisors moved quickly in supporting the goal of ending unemployment relief by voting for thirteen public works projects totaling \$35 million to be placed on the ballot November 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>217</sup> Another newspaper reported Rossi’s follow-up speeches at a series of luncheon meetings held by the Downtown Association.<sup>218</sup> Rossi reported that he expected quick approval of the \$35 million in projects.<sup>219</sup>

It is no coincidence that Rossi stepped up his personal appearances and events expanding and amplifying his public persona. He presided at the dedication of the Coit Tower Memorial.<sup>220</sup> He welcomed Marconi, inventor of the wireless, to the city.<sup>221</sup> He welcomed two San Francisco major league baseball players to the city, including Lefty

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<sup>213</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, September 30, 1933.

<sup>214</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 30, 1933.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, September 30, 1933.

<sup>216</sup> *San Francisco News*, September 30, 1933.

<sup>217</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 30, 1933.

<sup>218</sup> *Call Bulletin*, October 4, 1933.

<sup>219</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 10, 1933.

<sup>220</sup> *Call Bulletin*, October 9, 1933; *San Francisco Examiner*, October 8, 1933.

O'Doul.<sup>222</sup> He greeted Helen Hull, winner of the U.S. tennis championship.<sup>223</sup> He was inducted as an Iroquois chief under the name "Big Friend of the People."<sup>224</sup> For the calendar year 1933, newspaper articles contained 295 entries on Rossi's activities, an increase of 65 percent over 1932. Among 20,000 articles in his clippings files, Rossi's name was mentioned in newspapers 932 times in 1932. Rossi monitored the clipping books his staff was accumulating and saw the number of articles mentioning his name. He realized that the older model of city-federal relationships, which kept cities at a distance, was obsolete. There was a new need to be identified as the father of the city and the one who worked to ensure the security of his family. Rossi's attendance and enthusiastic reception at the Conference of Mayors therefore had a profound and deep effect on Rossi's view of paternalism and modern politics as well as the relationship between the city and the federal government. He realized what had been done by his predecessor, James Rolph, and he further realized the importance of a relationship with Roosevelt. Roosevelt's increasing popularity was evident, and it was an inescapable conclusion that Republican mayors should join with Democratic mayors alike and embrace the New Deal philosophy. This allegiance to Roosevelt was not lost on Roosevelt himself. He ultimately saw all the New Deal projects as potential political advancement.

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, October 18, 1933.

<sup>222</sup> *San Francisco News*, October 15, 1933.

<sup>223</sup> *Call Bulletin*, October 7, 1933.

<sup>224</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 16, 1933.

## V. AN ADVOCATE FOR SAN FRANCISCO

Contrary to earlier expectations, the Depression did not ease. In the fall of 1933, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that 53,691 persons were still on city relief. The number of people on relief had steadily increased.<sup>225</sup>

Twenty million dollars' worth of public works were expected to begin in San Francisco before the year ended. Angelo Rossi continued to capitalize on his alleged insider status by saying that there would be no red tape with Washington, as reported in the *San Francisco News* on November 9, 1933.

As the nation faced the winter of 1933-1934, Roosevelt realized that the previous federal projects had not put people immediately back to work. He needed and wanted to show action, and immediate action, and by executive order on November 9, 1933, he created another new agency, the Civil Works Administration. He diverted \$400 million of PWA funds to the CWA to provide work and wages without delay. Harry Hopkins was again put in charge.<sup>226</sup> The CWA was a significant and drastic departure from earlier federal-relief programs. Since the PWA had been "bogged down in technicalities, leaving most men with no immediate prospect for jobs until 1935," and given the unyielding and increasing Depression, Roosevelt felt it absolutely necessary to create this new agency.<sup>227</sup> The CWA, unlike the PWA and predecessor agencies, involved direct employment of workers on public projects. In fact, it was "a stop-gap measure to merely

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<sup>225</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, October 27, 1933.

<sup>226</sup> Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*, p. 38.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

create jobs.”<sup>228</sup> The CWA was totally federal in nature, and its head, Hopkins, had complete authority to pick projects as well as who would be in charge in each state.<sup>229</sup> Incredibly, by Christmas of 1933 (in approximately sixty days’ time), 4,000,000 Americans were at work under the CWA projects.

Rossi immediately responded and in November, shortly after the formation of the CWA, left for Washington at the invitation of Hopkins. To seek enough money for 15,000 unemployed, Rossi started “on a journey which is hoped will transform the winter of discontent into a season of security for San Francisco’s unemployment.” It was expected that \$20 million of the \$400 million allocated to this program would be given to California. The program was to provide five dollars a day (the prevailing wage for laborers) and was expected to put people to work within two weeks.<sup>230</sup>

Rossi’s trip to the East was again given tremendous publicity. The *Chicago Herald Examiner* and the *Chicago Daily News* included a picture of Rossi and his wife arriving in Chicago on their way to Washington.<sup>231</sup> Other papers reported that Rossi was in Washington to request relief money for workers under the new CWA.<sup>232</sup> The number of people on relief continued to rise. By November of 1933, the number of individuals on relief in San Francisco reached almost 56,000. The *San Francisco News* on November 14, 1933, reported that twenty governors and 150 mayors had descended on Washington for an explanation of the CWA program and details on putting four million unemployed people to work immediately. The San Francisco delegates were asking for

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>230</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, November 11, 1933.

<sup>231</sup> *Chicago Herald Examiner*, November 14, 1933; *Chicago Daily News*, November 14, 1933.

approval of major renovations and construction sites, which would employ 12,000 workers.<sup>233</sup> Rossi quickly announced that 9,000 people would be back to work by December 1<sup>st</sup> and by December 15<sup>th</sup> another group would be at work.<sup>234</sup> The *Call Bulletin* reported that the PWA had finally allocated \$2.6 million for a federal building in San Francisco. It was also reported at the Conference of Mayors in Washington that the workers would be receiving forty-five cents an hour for thirty hours a week and opined, “It is well worth trying. Millions will be saved in direct relief that barely keeps its recipients alive. Three-fourths of all jobless heads of family will find themselves working at useful tasks for real wages, and the City will have valuable improvements to show for it.”<sup>235</sup> Newspapers were candidly acknowledging that this was indeed true relief. After arriving in Washington, Rossi received coverage from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which reported that Rossi would be asking to fund various projects and put San Francisco citizens back to work as soon as possible<sup>236</sup>

Rossi, after his trip to Washington, went on to New York to discuss bond issues with Wall Street executives. He was capitalizing on his popularity and the importance of funding projects immediately.<sup>237</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* in its November 21, 1933, editorial continued to announce various job projects that would be funded throughout the year, showing that the mayor was helping provide additional jobs for the city.

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<sup>232</sup> *San Francisco News*, November 14, 1933.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, November 15, 1933.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, November 16, 1933.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 15, 1933.

<sup>237</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, November 17, 1933.

The press made much of Hopkins briefing Rossi and other mayors at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington on November 13<sup>th</sup> as to the explanation of CWA rules and regulations.<sup>238</sup> The mayors were receiving a lesson in how to obtain federal relief, much to the pleasure of the local press.

Roosevelt's and Rossi's paternalism continued to exhibit itself in various newspaper articles. For example, in November, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported "Much of the jobless back from fruitless fields into the rich harvest lands ... re-employment yesterday was in full stride throughout San Francisco and all of California."<sup>239</sup> The article then went on to say that Roosevelt's plan for \$400 million in civil works programs was in full swing with Rossi recommending various projects on which to begin construction immediately. This article was echoed by the *San Francisco Examiner* as well on November 21, 1933. However, questions remained as to whether or not relief work was legitimate. One of the local civil works administrators, Frederick Whitton, came to San Francisco and was concerned: "We're not going to put men to work on useless jobs," he snapped; "we won't hire men to take a wheelbarrow of sand from one spot and take it back again, and there's the rub." He went on to contend that there were not enough jobs available or enough useful projects available to put all 15,990 San Francisco unemployed to work before the federal deadline of February 15, 1934.<sup>240</sup> In November of that year, various additional articles talked about Rossi's efforts to

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>239</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 21, 1933.

<sup>240</sup> *San Francisco News*, November 24, 1933. It is interesting that this article goes out of its way to state that the WPA head was 64 years old.



employ as many skilled workers as possible,<sup>241</sup> the goal to get men to work quickly and to do something worthwhile,<sup>242</sup> praising Roosevelt and the CWA as “a courageous and timely institution,”<sup>243</sup> and eliminating red tape on PWA projects.<sup>244</sup> There was even a picture of Rossi “back on the job” returning from Washington.<sup>245</sup> Other papers ran actual tables on the number of people employed on various jobs, both women and men. By December 1, 1933, 7,900 men were to be back to work.<sup>246</sup> The depths of the Depression were well-illustrated when on Thanksgiving Day, 3,200 men showed up to work on the Lake Merced Road project, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* displayed an almost full-page picture of these men in long lines entering the work area with picks and shovels.<sup>247</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* on December 2, 1933, showed two men looking at their paychecks, relating that it was the first paycheck received by either of them in three years. Rossi continued to praise the CWA and stated, “Yesterday marked the taking off relief lists and the placing in employment of thousands of our fellow San Franciscans. None who remarked the enthusiasm with which these thousands so long deprived of proper morale joyously took to the arduous tasks on our day of national holiday, Thanksgiving.”<sup>248</sup>

There were dark clouds on the horizon, however. By December of 1933, New York bankers were offering to buy the PWA bonds from the City of San Francisco at

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<sup>241</sup> *Call Bulletin*, November 22, 1933.

<sup>242</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1933.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, November 24, 1933.

<sup>245</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1933.

<sup>246</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, December 1, 1933.

<sup>247</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 1, 1933.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

only 6 percent yield. The board of supervisors rejected that, opining that it had never paid more than 5 percent, and Rossi again went east to confer with Secretary Ickes.<sup>249</sup>

Rossi's trip to Washington included a meeting with the executive committee of the United States Conference of Mayors and a meeting with bond executives regarding interest rates that would be paid to purchase the bonds.<sup>250</sup> While the mid-December headlines continued to express optimism—for example, "Civil Works Unemployment Drive Nears Full Quota—Friday Is Final Deadline—All Existing Projects Expanded to Make Places,"<sup>251</sup> "Rossi Speeds Loan Negotiations in East,"<sup>252</sup> "U.S. Aid for Cities Urged by U.S. Mayors,"<sup>253</sup> and "City Leaders to Appeal for School Bonds"<sup>254</sup>—all led up to a conference with the executive committee at the United States Conference of Mayors with Treasury Secretary Morgenthau, Governor Black of the Federal Reserve System, and Harry Hopkins. The mayors pressed for extending CWA money for cities; they praised the CWA as "the most constructive effort yet taken to give regular work and wages to thousands of unemployed."<sup>255</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* on December 15, 1933, reported that mayors were asking for additional financial assistance. Articles continued to discuss the number of eligible people working for CWA wages and its advantage in preventing homelessness and starving in the streets during the winter of 1933-34.<sup>256</sup> PWA bonds were approved by an overwhelming majority—over two-thirds

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<sup>249</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 6, 1933; *San Francisco Examiner*, December 8, 1933.

<sup>250</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, December 15, 1933.

<sup>251</sup> *San Francisco News*, December 14, 1933.

<sup>252</sup> *Call Bulletin*, December 15, 1933.

<sup>253</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, December 15, 1933.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 94.

<sup>256</sup> *San Francisco News*, December 16, 1933.

of the voters said yes. Rossi continued to be confident that the work bonds would be financed by the federal government.<sup>257</sup> Rossi took full advantage of every avenue of publicity. He telegraphed the city from Washington, congratulating the citizens on passing the bond issue so overwhelmingly.<sup>258</sup> On Rossi's return, the first thing he did was dispatch a Christmas telegram to President and Mrs. Roosevelt.<sup>259</sup> The papers reported that Rossi continued to be optimistic about federal funding and federal loans.<sup>260</sup>

The uniqueness of the CWA and its tremendous popularity among those who needed some sort of employment also caused substantial discontent and criticism, primarily from financial conservatives within the White House as well as the Congress. Not only was the traditional conservative-liberal dispute between Roosevelt and the Congress, but there were also other causes for the discontent with this program, including private industry, which continued to object to federal relief as a competitive factor. Complaints often came from contractors who had previously done public works and who now found themselves shut out by CWA projects. Agricultural business also opposed the CWA based on its high wages. There was also the contention that the CWA was no more than a make-work program and that it was mired in inefficiency. Of course, the traditional conservative view also opposed a philosophy of make-work as contrary to the American ideal. Roosevelt himself, facing reelection in 1936 and receiving these criticisms, decided to disband the CWA in January 1934.<sup>261</sup>

As 1934 opened, however, Rossi took the unprecedented step of actually writing

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<sup>257</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, December 20, 1933.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, December 24, 1933

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*; *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 24, 1933.

an article for the *Call Bulletin*. He was quoted in the January 1, 1934, edition as saying “The various recovery measures adopted by the President ... are beginning to show real results,” touting the civil works program and his optimism that people were going back to work and that the government would continue its efforts. Obviously, the president did not agree that the CWA was as critical as he had earlier suggested.<sup>262</sup>

In early 1934, Ickes okayed huge projects through the PWA for San Francisco totaling almost \$15 million. Unfortunately, the newspapers got it wrong. They reported that the money was coming through the CWA, which was shortly to end, rather than the PWA. PWA funds were much more restrictive; the projects had to be self-liquidating and were more mired in red tape than the CWA projects. PWA funding presented hurdles for cities through the end of the decade.<sup>263</sup> During early January of 1934, hardly a day went by when one paper or another did not discuss various PWA projects, government relief, and putting people back to work. Roosevelt’s decision (backed by Congress) to discontinue the CWA was the subject of lobbying by all the major urban center mayors, including Rossi, who asked the president to continue the CWA program and whose telegrams expressed the dire effect its discontinuance would have on 16,000 employed people and an additional 50,000 people on relief.<sup>264</sup>

Undaunted, Rossi continued to work with his mentor, Governor Rolph, and in January promoted a birthday party for Roosevelt’s 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday on President’s Day—two Republicans supporting a Democrat and lobbying to continue CWA funding. Both

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<sup>261</sup> For further information, see Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*.

<sup>262</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 95.

<sup>263</sup> *San Francisco News*, January 6, 1934.

<sup>264</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 14, 1934; *San Francisco Examiner*, January 14, 1934.

recognized that it would be difficult for any politician to survive the Depression era without the continuing support of the president and federal funding programs. This is especially true as daily newspaper articles discussed the benefits of New Deal relief. In fact, the *Call Bulletin* stated that \$36.7 million had been spent on relief for San Francisco in 1933.<sup>265</sup> One editorial brazenly contended that San Francisco would not have problems with further federal relief because Rossi had made friends with and won the confidence of Secretary Ickes. It also reported that even the powerful Democratic lobby would not make attacks on San Francisco's Republican leader, Rossi.<sup>266</sup>

The CWA formally came to an end on February 15, 1934, and on the same day, Ickes notified all state boards that no more projects would be considered by the PWA. Of course, Rossi protested and stressed the fact that San Francisco had already passed a bond issue and believing the federal government would fund these projects.<sup>267</sup>

By the end of February 1934, CWA workers were unemployed. They immediately turned to the city for unemployment relief. Rossi asked the PWA to shift money to help employ these individuals.<sup>268</sup> Rossi had tied his political future to the New Deal. Now it appeared that Roosevelt, in spite of high unemployment, was reverting to a more traditional and conservative economic policy, leaving the cities with substantial problems. Riots occurred in some cities, political unrest grew, and public works moved at a snail's pace.<sup>269</sup>

The *San Francisco Chronicle* opined on February 26, 1934, that it was "a pity

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<sup>265</sup> *Call Bulletin*, January 22, 1934.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, January 25, 1934.

<sup>267</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 14, 1934.

<sup>268</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, February 24, 1934.

CWA and PWA did not fit together.” In the spring, there were predictions of increased numbers of people on relief. It was estimated that San Francisco would need \$8 million for relief for the 1934-1935 fiscal year, given the number of people being laid off from CWA jobs.<sup>270</sup> By Easter, attacks on the federal system were being voiced by various mayors, including the mayor of New Orleans, who criticized the federal government’s PWA program and aid system.<sup>271</sup>

The *San Francisco News* summarized the CWA achievements in a series of articles recalling how Mayor Rossi had gone to Washington in November 1933 to receive information on this new program. It acknowledged that the program was a “unique expedient of the Roosevelt administration to meet the unemployment problems during the winter.”<sup>272</sup> The CWA employed 22,768 men and women; \$4,805,000 was disbursed. Fifty cities started federal projects.

As San Francisco made the transition from CWA to PWA projects in 1934, newspapers continued to extol the number of PWA contracts being signed and mailed but complained of the red-tape delays. By June of 1934, the federal government through Ickes began a series of moves that would continue until the end of the Depression. Ickes announced that San Francisco’s \$18 million in public works bonds were in jeopardy.<sup>273</sup> The New Deal has been criticized for having little policy or any real ideological program and as being merely “a series of improvisations that were bereft of any coherent and

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<sup>269</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 97.

<sup>270</sup> *Call Bulletin*, March 1, 1934; *San Francisco Examiner*, March 1, 1934.

<sup>271</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, March 30, 1934.

<sup>272</sup> *San Francisco News*, April 6, 1934.

<sup>273</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, June 22, 1934.

plausible body of belief.”<sup>274</sup> Roosevelt’s inability to commit to a cohesive economic relief program created a series of pushes for federal relief with corresponding periods when federal programs were withdrawn. This inconsistency engendered fear and concern not only in urban leaders but in the citizenry as well.

Rossi, however, was able to calm fears and continued to advocate for more federal money. By July of 1934, his paternalistic style of leadership was receiving major editorial coverage. The editorials spoke of Rossi’s dignified calm and his simple, kindly, human attitude. One article asserted that he saved the day from the union strike and city-wide strike.<sup>275</sup> This was echoed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco News* on July 21, 1934.

That summer, the first PWA money was released for federal projects, including the Bay crossing pipeline and the general hospital.<sup>276</sup> To save additional money and be fiscally responsible, the supervisors agreed to cut the payroll of city employees by 60 percent.<sup>277</sup> Rossi continued to exhibit signs of personal popularity, including a well-publicized visit to Governor Rolph’s grave site to hear the playing of the song, “Smiles,” the governor’s favorite.<sup>278</sup>

Faced with increasing demands and the lack of federal funds brought about by the end of the CWA, Rossi denounced U.S. Secretary of State Wallace, who withdrew federal aid from American Merchant Marine in July.<sup>279</sup> Rossi reported that he was taking

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<sup>274</sup> Flanagan, “Roosevelt,” p. 417.

<sup>275</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, July 20, 1934.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, August 31, 1934.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, August 14, 1934.

<sup>278</sup> *Call Bulletin*, August 23, 1934; *San Francisco Examiner*, August 23, 1934..

<sup>279</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, August 26, 1934.

the model plan of unified administration (city and county in one government) directly to the president and to the other mayors in the upcoming United States Conference of Mayors in September.<sup>280</sup>

Fiorello LaGuardia was elected mayor of New York in 1934 and brought outstanding leadership to the Conference of Mayors at executive sessions and meetings in September of that year.<sup>281</sup> The mayors argued that the Depression had changed the economic picture of the United States in an unprecedented way. They argued that the United States government should pay a higher percentage of unemployment costs than the cities.<sup>282</sup> It was the Republican LaGuardia who suggested that the unemployment problem be bifurcated. The first segment should be those individuals considered employable, who would be responsible and could be offered fair wages to do productive work. This segment would be helped by the federal government. The so-called “unemployable,” those who suffered some impediment preventing them from taking gainful employment, should be the responsibility of the states and local entities with some sort of permanent public program. This second tier was later addressed by the Social Security Act, which provided for social security welfare.<sup>283</sup>

By November of 1934, midterm elections had resulted in great strengthening of New Dealers in Congress and the ousting of various conservative opponents.<sup>284</sup>

Roosevelt ultimately accepted the mayors’ program, and he agreed that there were two groups of individuals—the employables and the unemployables. That same month, the

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<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, September 3, 1934.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 99.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*



United States Conference of Mayors met in Chicago and continued to advocate federal works and relief programs. Rossi soon formed an allegiance with Mayor LaGuardia. In the *San Francisco Chronicle* on November 25, 1934, there appeared a picture of LaGuardia and Rossi along with the mayor of Houston conferring on civic problems. The accompanying article explained how ninety-six big-city mayors had pledged cooperation with Roosevelt, all of whom asked Congress as well as the president to increase the scope and size of housing and slum clearance. They asked for the government to make loans to municipalities. The mayors supposedly all agreed that the country had reached a new normal level that dictated the need for a long-term program to meet unemployment issues. They strongly urged a permanent federal public works program. They demanded loans for self-liquidating public works. Rossi was chosen to remain on the executive committee; LaGuardia was president-elect.<sup>285</sup> Rossi again received press, with a picture of himself and LaGuardia entitled “East Meets West” in the *Call Bulletin*.<sup>286</sup>

Rossi, however, took a cautious step backward when in late November he advised that the United States government could not or should not carry the relief load forever.<sup>287</sup> At the same time, he released information to the press about the PWA projects in San Francisco totaling over \$8 million as of the end of 1934.<sup>288</sup> There continued to be negative rumblings regarding the requests for federal money. The *San Francisco News* on December 6, 1934, reported that Rossi “in Chicago ... saw so many mayors with their

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<sup>284</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 100.

<sup>285</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 25, 1934.

<sup>286</sup> *Call Bulletin*, November 26, 1934.

<sup>287</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 28, 1934.

hands stretched out for federal cash—his own among them—that he can't vision how the present state of things can go on much longer.” With his pro-business Republican background, Rossi was a stronger advocate than most Democratic mayors for the private sector taking on a larger role to absorb the unemployed. He was quoted as saying, “I feel that the federal government’s burden is such that private business should take steps on its own to absorb the unemployed.”<sup>289</sup>

In 1934, there were 759 articles that developed Rossi’s public persona in one way or another. This was a significant increase over the 932 in 1933. The total number of articles mentioning Rossi in 1934 was 2,940, an incredible increase over 1933. The articles were wide-ranging, from a local party honoring FDR that was reported in the *San Francisco Examiner* on January 23, 1934 to Rossi viewing the parade of ships into San Francisco Bay in February of that year. He joined city officials in a drive for more of a presence of the Pacific fleet, urging the Navy to ask the fleet to spend more time in the San Francisco harbor.<sup>290</sup> He made Marconi an honorary citizen of the city on his visit, as reported by the *San Francisco Chronicle* on February 28, 1934, and the *Examiner* on April 26, 1934. He joined a Palm Sunday ceremony.<sup>291</sup> He threw the first pitch at the opening of the baseball season for the San Francisco Seals.<sup>292</sup> He greeted Yehudi Menuhin, the famous violinist raised in San Francisco, as reported in *Emmanuel* and the *Jewish Journal* on April 6, 1934. The *San Francisco News* reported on April 6, 1934, that a playground was being named for Rossi. The *San Francisco News* also reported

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<sup>288</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, December 3, 1934.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, November 27, 1934.

<sup>290</sup> *San Francisco News*, February 20, 1934.

<sup>291</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 26, 1934.

that he was honored by the U.S. Conference of Mayors on May 9, 1934. Upon Governor Rolph's death, Rossi was shown eulogizing his beloved friend and attending his funeral services in June 1934. He was even mentioned in Walter Winchell's column in June.<sup>293</sup> He greeted a variety of people, from Buddhist leaders, as reported in the *Examiner* on November 9, 1934, to Blue Eagle Committee members on the same date (*San Francisco News*), while at the same time endorsing San Francisco Cheese Week as reported in the *California Retail Grocers' Advocate*. He exhibited his Italian heritage, as the *Examiner* reported him playing bocce ball on December 29, 1934.

In his annual message to Congress in January of 1935, President Roosevelt condemned public relief. His rhetoric was just another example of the complex New Deal relationship with American cities, namely large-scale federal involvement without a permanent commitment to relief. He made the following statement:

The lessons of history, confirmed by the evidence immediately before me, show conclusively that the continued dependence upon relief induces a spirit of moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit ... the federal government must and shall quit this business of relief.<sup>294</sup>

Paradoxically, however, in January 1935, Roosevelt introduced the Economic Security Act, which contained the unemployment insurance program, pensions, and additional public aid. Shortly thereafter, Roosevelt introduced the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 for a \$4.8 billion public work program. Both passed in the House of Representatives within days. The ERAA allowed the President nearly \$5

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<sup>292</sup> *San Francisco News*, April 4, 1934.

<sup>293</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, June 22, 1934.

<sup>294</sup> Timothy Keegan, "W.P.A. Construction in San Francisco (1935–1942)," *The Argonaut: Journal of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer 2003): 4.

billion to utilize at his complete discretion. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., described it thus: “The second New Deal was about to begin.”<sup>295</sup>

These activities were reported repeatedly by the San Francisco press. LaGuardia was quoted by the *San Francisco Examiner* as declaring that after the meeting with the president and the committee of mayors that the president would gain the full realization and understanding of the cities’ problems.<sup>296</sup>

After the CWA was dismantled, direct public relief from the federal government was at an end. It was no surprise, therefore, that Rossi began pleading for state funds. He stated, “With federal funds virtually exhausted, our only hope seems to lie in the \$24 million state bond issue voted at the November election.”<sup>297</sup> The CWA had ultimately employed four million people on various relief projects; however, it was envisioned as an “emergency stopgap to create jobs. The CWA was an uneasy hybrid of social work, compassion, and engineering know-how.”<sup>298</sup>

The city increasingly sought PWA funds for various projects and badgered Secretary Ickes to complete the paperwork so that the projects could start.<sup>299</sup> In March of 1935, Ickes did an about-face regarding the PWA funds for Hetch Hetchy water when he contended that the Raker Act, a federal law, provided that San Francisco could not transmit power from the dam over PG&E lines. It would have to own the facilities. The Raker Act prohibited the sale of Hetch Hetchy electric power to a private corporation.

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<sup>295</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 103.

<sup>296</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, September 23, 1934.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, February 4, 1935.

<sup>298</sup> Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*, p. 38.

<sup>299</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 2, 1935; *San Francisco Examiner*, March 6, 1935; *Call Bulletin*, March 9, 1935.

PG&E's contract with the city allowed it to purchase water and then sell it to San Francisco customers. The supervisors agreed to "submit to the voters a charter amendment to make possible municipal distribution of its power as directed by the Raker Act."<sup>300</sup> Of course, this was the same issue that was brought up in 1925 and that continued through the end of Depression. In fact, the issue was not decided until the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a decision in 1939. The Court upheld Ickes' interpretation of the Raker Act. Undaunted, Rossi continued to lobby for PWA money and even flew to Washington to talk directly with Paul Betters, the secretary of the Conference of Mayors.<sup>301</sup>

In an effort to bolster their political leverage, de facto coalitions of urban leaders, heretofore unprecedented, sprang into existence. In April, Mayor Kelly of Chicago and Mayor Hague of Jersey City met with Rossi in San Francisco to discuss public works money and PWA money. The mayors were utilizing their collective civic influence to pressure Washington for more help. They were also providing each other with political support to enhance their own futures as paternalistic leaders.<sup>302</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* posted a half-page picture of Rossi sitting between Kelly and Hague, discussing PWA work.<sup>303</sup>

New Deal programs were not turning the economy around, and with seemingly no end in sight to this deep depression, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7034 in April of 1935, which created the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The program was

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<sup>300</sup> *San Francisco News*, March 15, 1935.

<sup>301</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, April 7, 1935.

<sup>302</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 21, 1935.

<sup>303</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, April 27, 1935.

simple: one had to be at least eighteen years old, unemployed, not on relief, physically fit, have work skills, and only one family member could take part in the program. Preferences were given to veterans, then widows, and then wives of unemployed veterans.<sup>304</sup> The city supplied the labor, and the federal government paid for most of the project expenses.<sup>305</sup> The WPA made available \$4.88 billion dollars for relief with the goal of increasing employment. It was intended to replace the projects abruptly ended by the demise of the CWA. This new program was indeed exciting. The mayors were back in business with federal relief for city projects and not just federal projects. The WPA “ushered in a new period of public works unrivalled even by the salad days of the CWA.”<sup>306</sup> It reestablished a strong city-federal relationship that allowed the paternalistic mayors to realize continued support from the electorate.

The executive order signed by the president also left it to the mayors to be the “voice of city interests sitting alongside business, labor, agriculture and the banks.”<sup>307</sup> President Roosevelt had asked, to no one’s surprise, that LaGuardia act as the voice of the mayors. Roosevelt’s close confidant, Hopkins, was appointed administrator of the CWA, which, again, surprised no one.

By July of 1935, Rossi was a candidate for reelection. Rossi stressed in his candidacy statement his fiscal responsibility in dealing with the federal government to obtain relief.<sup>308</sup> In the summer of 1935, the use of WPA monies to put able-bodied

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<sup>304</sup> Keegan, “W.P.A. Construction,” p. 4

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 107.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>308</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 14, 1935; *San Francisco Examiner*, July 12, 1935.

people to work was a frequent subject in local newspapers.<sup>309</sup> By August, the assistant city manager prepared a list of projects, including roads, parks, public buildings, and other improvements, which totaled \$15 million. This list would be submitted to the WPA for immediate funding. Rossi added to the hopes that twenty percent of the WPA funds that were normally required to be paid by the city would be waived by the federal government.<sup>310</sup> The *Call Bulletin* reported that San Francisco's request for \$10 million of the \$15 million in WPA funds had been given to Hopkins. The article reprinted a telegram sent to Rossi from the city engineer that articulated the fact that \$10 million in projects were part of a \$25 million WPA program. In other words, after the WPA program, millions of dollars were being bandied about by Rossi and city employees as a means of a new relief package that would furnish 20,000 man years of labor.<sup>311</sup> By September, funding was granted for the Yerba Buena projects in the amount of \$3 million and an additional \$5 million of WPA money was approved. The *Call Bulletin* ran extensive coverage: "Our fair [the 1939 World Fair] is assured thanks to the individuals who worked for their San Francisco." Rossi, of course, was prominently mentioned.<sup>312</sup> The October 1935 issue of *Coast and Pacific Banker* of San Francisco, California, heartily endorsed Rossi for reelection. The editorial stressed his understanding of not only the businessman but the working man as well. It cited his "absence of hullabaloo" and stated that the government "of the city has moved along as it should, like well-oiled clockworks, no trouble, no excitement, everything as it should be." They pointed to

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<sup>309</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, July 28, 1935.

<sup>310</sup> *San Francisco News*, August 8, 1935; *San Francisco News*, August 22, 1935.

<sup>311</sup> *Call Bulletin*, August 26, 1935.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, September 26, 1935.

Rossi's life being marked by a very modest beginning, poor in dollars, rich in ambition.<sup>313</sup> By year's end, Rossi's relationship with the electorate was solidly paternalistic. The *San Jose Mercury News* on November 1, 1935, cited the fact that business and civic leaders as well as labor supported him. In fact, the unions officially endorsed Rossi for reelection.<sup>314</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* endorsed Rossi with the headline "Reelection of Rossi Urged to Stabilize City."<sup>315</sup> He was reelected overwhelmingly in November. Factors such as his modesty and his safeguards of city benefits for citizens were mentioned frequently.<sup>316</sup> Rossi garnered almost twice as many votes as his closest rival. Of course, there was continual news coverage giving Rossi credit for WPA wages in San Francisco.<sup>317</sup>

The year 1935 saw 881 articles that exhibited Rossi's special relationship with the citizens of San Francisco. He was mentioned a total number of 2,874 times during that year in the articles collected for his clippings file. During that year, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported, he greeted former soldiers,<sup>318</sup> led a committee for charitable football games, created a bowling league, assisted in ceremonies at art galleries, and opened a bowling tournament. Rossi even presided over a new-shoe party sponsored by the *San Francisco Examiner* on January 13, 1935, where 1,100 pairs of shoes were fitted and given to needy children. The article stated, "Some came limping, each step painful. Others were brought in their mothers' arms because they couldn't walk on the worn-out

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<sup>313</sup> *Coast and Pacific Banker*, October 1935.

<sup>314</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, October 7, 1935.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, October 29, 1935.

<sup>316</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 6, 1935; *San Francisco Examiner*, November 6, 1935.

<sup>317</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, October 26, 1935.

<sup>318</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 13, 1935.



caricatures that were all they had left of shoes.” The newspaper showed Rossi seated with two children with the captions “This Is Great” and “Mayor Rossi Shares Kiddies’ Joy.” The January 24, 1935, edition of the *San Francisco Examiner* shows Rossi receiving a birthday cake from the “girls in the office.” In February, he and Governor Merriam were chosen to lead the Grand March of the annual ball of the San Francisco Policemen’s Department. A photo in the February 15, 1935, *Examiner* showing San Francisco welcoming the fleet and displaying one of the unfinished towers of the Golden Gate Bridge in the background includes Rossi with various admirals in full Navy dress. A February 13, 1935, *San Francisco News* article shows Rossi buying tickets for the Bear/Poreda fight. The February 26, 1935, *San Francisco Chronicle* shows Rossi giving the key to the city to the impresario of the San Carlo Opera Company. On April 7, 1935, the *Call Bulletin* shows Rossi sitting at City Hall presiding at the opening of the Army Day festivities. In an April 26<sup>th</sup> photograph in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Rossi presides over a meeting, pleading for voters’ support to save the 1939 Exposition. His granddaughter was featured in the *Call Bulletin* in April 1935 as Queen of the May at the city’s annual May Day celebration. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, Rossi was pictured in the *San Francisco Chronicle* at the Businessmen’s Lunch to fight against Communism and the Depression. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the *San Francisco Examiner* showed him with various dignitaries including admirals and judges, proposing a modern-day Navy. On the next day, the *Call Bulletin* showed him purchasing “a bunch of forget-me-nots” for a campaign for disabled American veterans of the First World War.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> *Call Bulletin*, May 24, 1935.

In early summer, Rossi was pictured with Warner Brothers executives touting a new Warner Brothers world-premiere film of the building of the Golden Gate Bridge. The *San Francisco Examiner* in August showed Rossi marching at the head of the Veterans' Day Parade in Fresno. In August, he was shown in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Call Bulletin*, in a three-piece suit, no less, sitting in a rowboat catching bass at Lake Merced and extolling the virtues of that WPA project, which had been stocked and reopened to the public for fishing purposes. He was pictured with the Dionne quintuplets; the article's headline read "Present from Quints —Five New Admirers for Rossi"<sup>320</sup> and was shown again playing bocce ball at an undisclosed North Beach location.<sup>321</sup> Two days later, on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the *San Francisco Examiner* showed him on the baseball field, again in a three-piece suit, with Lefty O'Doul, the manager of the San Francisco Seals, greeting the public. The September 26<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Call Bulletin* found him dedicating the Kilpatrick Bakery.

Rossi's constant presence in San Francisco newspapers continued to enhance his persona as the father of the city – its advocate, protector, and figurehead. The coverage evoked a special relationship between Rossi and the city. The public-persona articles and pictures from the year 1935 depict a deepening bond between Rossi and San Franciscans that reached beyond his success in garnering federal relief. The cumulative effect of articles and pictures in the various local newspapers from the years 1931 through 1935 cannot be overemphasized (the number of articles dealing with Rossi's public persona from 1931 through 1935 total 2,609; the number of articles in that period mentioning

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<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, August 21, 1935.

Rossi total 8,408). The fate of San Francisco and its citizens intertwined with Rossi's future and his leadership.

Rossi's annual message in January of 1936 was a positive reassertion of his relationship with the federal government. He stated, "I am happy to announce that nearly all citizens of San Francisco eligible under the Works Progress Administration are now engaged in gainful occupation of a character commensurate with their ability and previous business and professional training."<sup>322</sup> He emphasized his influence with Washington and federal programs when he claimed that San Francisco was the only Pacific coast city able to comply with federal programs.<sup>323</sup> In fact, the city went on to sponsor an additional \$8 million in WPA projects.<sup>324</sup>

Political issues regarding the WPA began to surface by summer of that year. The mayor of Santa Barbara attacked the program by contending that "a man must register as a Democrat to obtain work relief."<sup>325</sup> LaGuardia and Rossi, however, continued to support the Roosevelt administration and the WPA programs. At an executive session of the Conference of Mayors in April, LaGuardia stated, "Without the aid of the federal government, I don't know what my city would have done. I'm sure most of the mayors feel the same way."<sup>326</sup> As evidence of the Rossi-LaGuardia coalition, both of them continued with the rhetoric of cooperation, formally and informally. They continued to joust regarding the two World's Fairs that were proposed in San Francisco and New

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<sup>321</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 31, 1935.

<sup>322</sup> Keegan, "W.P.A. Construction," p. 11.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, January 30, 1936.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, April 21, 1936.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, April 20, 1936.

York. LaGuardia was pictured in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on April 21, 1936, citing the opinions of the Conference of Mayor's executive committee that a disaster would occur if federal aid to cities were to be eliminated. What followed was a plethora of articles showing both Rossi and LaGuardia united in their efforts to influence Washington for federal relief. The mayors did fear that Roosevelt's threat to arbitrarily and numerically reduce the WPA rolls would be a disaster.<sup>327</sup> The relationship between Rossi and LaGuardia was illustrated in the *New York Times* on April 26, 1936, showing them jumping onto a pier from a San Francisco tugboat. Rossi frequently traveled east to meet with Hopkins, and another meeting was planned for June of 1936.<sup>328</sup> A *San Francisco Chronicle* article discussed the conference and that Rossi and Hopkins would confer on the distribution of WPA funds.

Rossi's ties with the WPA and the new programs were often repeated through the year. Hopkins and Rossi actually co-sponsored a radio program on the WPA, which aired on June 19, 1936.<sup>329</sup> By June 25<sup>th</sup>, an article appeared with Rossi waving to reporters as he re-entered San Francisco. The headline ran, "Home with the Bacon: Mayor Returns with Promises."<sup>330</sup>

An increasing number of big-city mayors began to grasp this new dynamic city-federal relationship. During the spring and summer of 1936, the mayors lobbied both Congress and the president, objecting to proposed reductions of the WPA budget. The *San Francisco Chronicle* was very candid and foresaw the political issues with regard to

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<sup>327</sup> *San Francisco News*, April 21, 1936.

<sup>328</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 12, 1936.

<sup>329</sup> *Call Bulletin*, June 19, 1936.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, June 25, 1936.

the WPA when it said,

The unanimous approval of the WPA spending by the mayors of the nation is subject to a certain discount. Each of these mayors is interested first of all in getting reelected. Charity begins at home, even with the mayors. Anything that brightens the prospect of reelection for a mayor is bound to have his hearty approval.<sup>331</sup>

Political consequences aside, Congress and the president were in a mood to cut back WPA funding. The mayors, however, continued to urge federal aid.<sup>332</sup> The future of the WPA was again discussed in the *San Francisco News* on June 19, 1936. The *Call Bulletin* also reported on the same date that Rossi had phoned about new relief from the federal capital and advised that President Roosevelt would be interested in visiting San Francisco to look at the Hetch Hetchy water district and the Bay bridges. The AP wire photo in June showed Rossi with Secretary Ickes conferring on federal aid, discussing the meeting Rossi had had with Roosevelt. Despite the optimistic mood of the country, the Depression was not over, and business had not rebounded by the fall of 1936.

LaGuardia and Rossi continued to foster their friendship. The *Washington Daily News* on November 19, 1936, discussed the fact that Rossi and LaGuardia, both of Italian lineage, were in Washington for the Conference of Mayors. The article commented on Rossi's modesty and the fact that his and LaGuardia's friendship was enmeshed in obtaining federal relief. That same day, the *San Francisco Chronicle* previewed the fact that LaGuardia had been elected the Conference of Mayors' president and that Rossi was also honored as a continuing trustee. There was no question that Rossi and LaGuardia were teaming together, in an east-west symbiotic relationship to promote federal relief for

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<sup>331</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 23, 1936.

cities. Rossi made headlines in a *U.S. News* article of December 14, 1936, with a picture, answering the question that the WPA rolls should not be reduced and that the unemployment problem was still pressing. He amplified the fact that San Francisco had done its fair share but felt that the Depression problem would continue for some time. He stuck to the party line that he was opposed to the dole in any form and that those who were seeking relief must do it through work.<sup>333</sup> In contrast to Rossi's optimism, the *New York Times* editorial of December 4, 1936 criticized the United States Conference of Mayors for urging more spending and called for a reduction in federal spending.<sup>334</sup>

In 1936, 457 newspaper articles collected by Rossi's staff displayed the mayor's relationship with San Franciscans. A total of 1,185 articles in the primary sources reviewed mentioned Rossi. Many of them dealt with the upcoming World's Fair. He was again shown fishing for bass at Lake Merced, going on a trip to Honolulu, heading the Policeman's Ball, entertaining former President Coolidge, attempting to surf in Honolulu, presiding at the Art Commission, and celebrating St. Patrick's Day, St. Joseph's Day, Army Day, and Good Friday. Many of Rossi's appearances would be considered normal for the mayor of a major metropolitan area; however, their increasing frequency as he embraced New Deal programs is palpable and significant.

Through 1937, a significant number of large-city mayors continued to press for WPA relief. LaGuardia joined Rossi and Shaw in Los Angeles in May.<sup>335</sup> At the Los Angeles conference, the mayors called for \$1.5 billion in relief for WPA projects for the

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<sup>332</sup> *New York Times*, April 26, 1936; *Call Bulletin*, June 19, 1936.

<sup>333</sup> *U.S. News & World Report*, December 14, 1936.

<sup>334</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 118.

<sup>335</sup> *Los Angeles Herald Express*, May 15, 1937.

coming year.<sup>336</sup> Although Rossi did not exhibit the theatricality of a Rolph or a LaGuardia, columnist Arthur Caylor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* opined that Rossi inherited the Rolph tradition “that mayors should appear everywhere in person at funerals, christenings, train arrivals and at the depot, banquets, installations, lodge affairs. Rolph could make these things a major activity, but Mr. Rossi has never developed an executive flair of saving himself [from these duties] or of delegating the routine of city affairs to others.”<sup>337</sup> By September, Rossi was asking Roosevelt to visit San Francisco.<sup>338</sup> Rossi once again left for Washington and the Conference of Mayors in November of 1937. He was quoted as saying,

“I’m not here to see what I can get out of the federal government,” said Rossi, former florist, now chief executive of San Francisco. “I agree that the cost of government should be cut wherever possible, but it’s all too easy to get up on a platform and shout ‘Reduce spending!’ What would happen if we turned 22,000 on relief in San Francisco out into the street? Unemployment is not a temporary local problem. It’s a national problem and must be addressed by the federal government.”

Other mayors, of course, agreed with this statement.<sup>339</sup>

LaGuardia opined that the mayors were confronted with actual conditions and that they should report conditions realistically, as the mayors saw them. He stated, “We find ourselves constantly in the role of beggars for federal funds, and we are daily hard pressed for more relief.”<sup>340</sup>

The positive publicity of Rossi’s involvement with the United States Conference of Mayors and that due to his being an insider regarding federal relief continued. Rossi

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<sup>336</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1937; *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1937.

<sup>337</sup> *San Francisco News*, May 20, 1937.

<sup>338</sup> *Call Bulletin*, September 21, 1937; *San Francisco Examiner*, September 22, 1937.

<sup>339</sup> *Washington Post*, November 15, 1937.

and LaGuardia were pictured in the *Washington Post* on November 16, 1937. Pictures of Rossi with LaGuardia and other mayors also appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other local papers.<sup>341</sup> The mayors honored Rossi and made him chairman of the Conference's executive committee, although some reported that he was slated to be president.<sup>342</sup> The *Call Bulletin* headline proclaimed, "Rossi Named Chairman of Mayors."<sup>343</sup>

The mayors went on to warn against politics in federal aid to cities. LaGuardia was quoted as saying, "This is too serious a problem to be used as a political bludgeon for any person's party but cries out to every red-blooded American for solutions to predicting increased demands for federal funds unless the business recession ends."<sup>344</sup> Hopkins told the group they could hope for an appropriation of \$150 million until the end of June, 1938. The fact that the mayors were now insisting on continual WPA relief was also covered in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on November 18, 1937 and the *Call Bulletin* on November 19, 1937. Rossi reported back in November that San Francisco would get millions of U.S. funds for the airport.<sup>345</sup> Again, pictures appeared of Rossi and LaGuardia in both New York and San Francisco newspapers. They were both fostering a paternalistic relationship with their citizens and showing that east and west were united in the goal of obtaining federal help.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> *New York Times*, November 16, 1937.

<sup>341</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 16, 1937; *San Francisco News*, November 16, 1937; *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 16, 1937.

<sup>342</sup> *Call Bulletin*, November 17, 1937.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>344</sup> *Washington Post*, November 18, 1937.

<sup>345</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 20, 1937; *San Francisco Examiner*, November 20, 1937.

<sup>346</sup> *The American New York*, November 20, 1937; *Philadelphia American*, November 20, 1937.



Throughout 1937, there was an increase in the number of articles showing Rossi's relationship with the citizens of San Francisco. Rossi is again featured in numerous reports and pictures in a variety of settings, including being invited to a new Frank Capra film, working with the Navy on the Navy League Grand Ball, leading the Washington Day Parade, wishing Amelia Earhart well as she left from Oakland for her round-the-world flight, honoring the memory of the deceased General Hunter Liggett, keynoting the San Francisco Realtors' Annual Fair, and advocating money for the San Francisco shipyard. He met a minister from Egypt, Italian consulate members, and Russian aviators, and he greeted Eleanor Roosevelt on her trip to San Francisco in April 1937. The articles enlarged Rossi's influence and reinforced his persona as the city's provider and advocate. Rossi is mentioned in 1,914 articles.

Despite the almost schizophrenic attitude of Washington toward federal relief for cities, federal programs had spent more than \$8 million on parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities in San Francisco by the end of 1937.<sup>347</sup> The summer of 1938 saw a series of articles on Rossi inviting Roosevelt to come to California for a tour of O'Shaughnessy Dam in connection with the Hetch Hetchy project. At the same time, Ickes threatened to cut PWA funds unless there were definite plans for power distribution.<sup>348</sup> Additionally, that summer, there was controversy as to whether or not San Francisco had to own the facilities of the Hetch Hetchy water program or whether it could work through PG&E.

It was important for Rossi to be aligned with Roosevelt, and when the president

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<sup>347</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 19.

decided to visit the Hetch Hetchy water project, Rossi was indeed pleased.<sup>349</sup> However, his detractors, including Arthur Caylor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, opined that Ickes had a private intention to pick a new mayor for San Francisco and would try to show the people of San Francisco that Rossi could no longer make money roll in from Washington.<sup>350</sup> Ickes did continue to hold up federal money for the Hetch Hetchy water district. All of the local newspapers strongly criticized Ickes and contended that he was taking away the freedom of choice from San Francisco citizens, that apparently some did want power from PG&E and not directly from Hetch Hetchy.<sup>351</sup> Roosevelt's strong and unrelenting desire for hegemony over federal relief projects was well demonstrated when he continued to back his unpopular secretary of the Interior. The telegrams between Ickes and Rossi continued through the end of the year; some papers even referred to Ickes as the "Secretary of the Inferior," calling him the "self-appointed disciple of righteous empire of destiny, he is depriving millions of PWA money."<sup>352</sup> Finally, in July, the president visited San Francisco and the new Treasure Island, being built for the upcoming fair—a visit marked by tumultuous crowds and wonderful editorials.<sup>353</sup> Each paper showed pictures of Roosevelt with Rossi, whether they were at lunch or going to the site of the Golden Gate Exposition or dedicating some monument.<sup>354</sup> Still, others began taking potshots at the mayor's growing inability to find funding for some of the federal projects. Herb Caen, a new columnist for the *Chronicle*, opined, "This is a story about

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<sup>348</sup> See, generally, *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 3 and 4, 1938; *Call Bulletin*, July 5, 1938.

<sup>349</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 6, 1938.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> *Sunset News*, July 7, 1938.

<sup>352</sup> *San Francisco News*, July 8, 1938.

<sup>353</sup> *Call Bulletin*, July 14, 1938; *San Francisco Examiner*, July 14, 1938.

our magnanimous mayor, Mr. Rossi. Mr. Rossi, you may have noticed, likes to appear at public functions anytime, anywhere.”<sup>355</sup> Despite the apparently close connection between Rossi and Roosevelt, PWA grants were rescinded in August of that year.<sup>356</sup>

In December of 1938, the WPA was cut back drastically, and at a mass meeting in San Francisco of over 20,000 WPA workers, there was a great protest regarding the drastically reduced payroll.<sup>357</sup> Midterm elections in 1938 found Congress less accommodating toward public relief, and the House of Representatives tried to substantially reduce WPA funding.<sup>358</sup> The president proposed a greatly reduced budget for WPA funds, which would cover only half of the requests made by the mayors. The WPA reduction took 44,000 off the California payroll. In so doing, the House cited waste, extravagance, and subversive propaganda against the government.<sup>359</sup> With the WPA apparently coming to an end, LaGuardia and Rossi both increased their efforts to appear together and lobby for federal aid.

Was Rossi’s political career in jeopardy? His former adversary, Supervisor Adolph Uhl, again announced his candidacy. He was opposing Rossi even though Rossi had received the highest vote count ever received by a mayoral candidate in San Francisco in 1936.<sup>360</sup>

Perhaps as a prediction of the 1939 election and the curtailment of federal funds, Rossi’s indicia of public persona reached a zenith of 1,225 news articles in 1938, three

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<sup>354</sup> *San Francisco News*, July 14, 1938; *San Francisco Examiner*, July 15, 1938.

<sup>355</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 20, 1938.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, August 21, 1938.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, December 25, 1938.

<sup>358</sup> Gunther, *Federal-City Relations*, p. 122.

<sup>359</sup> *Sacramento Union*, January 13, 1939.

times the number of articles that appeared in 1931. The total number of articles mentioning Rossi in 1938 was greater than any year before or after—3,396. The cumulative effect of articles mentioning Rossi by the end of 1938 and the increasing focus on Rossi as federal funds became scarce indicate that there was a need to demonstrate to the citizens that federal ties were strong and that actions would be taken to solve continued unemployment.

In the first half of 1939, Rossi stepped up his public appearances. He was seen aiding Spanish babies in February,<sup>361</sup> dedicating Aquatic Park (constructed with WPA funds) with his wife,<sup>362</sup> urging Congress to continue the FHA program,<sup>363</sup> proclaiming Aviatrix Day,<sup>364</sup> greeting the Mexican actor Leo Carrillo,<sup>365</sup> greeting Al Jolson,<sup>366</sup> paying respects to the Nazi German Council for San Francisco,<sup>367</sup> and taking part in a 49ers'-style festival,<sup>368</sup> among other functions.

As 1939 wore on, there were more articles about peace, more articles about Communists, and fewer articles about government relief. For example, Rossi praised Pope Pius XI upon his death as an advocate of peace.<sup>369</sup> Another example is the substantial publicity given the opening of the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition at Treasure Island.<sup>370</sup> Whenever LaGuardia came to town, there was a lot of coverage of

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<sup>360</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 4, 1939.

<sup>361</sup> *San Francisco News*, February 27, 1939.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, January 23, 1939.

<sup>363</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, February 28, 1939.

<sup>364</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 28, 1939.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, January 29, 1939.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, February 2, 1939.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, February 3, 1939.

<sup>369</sup> *San Francisco News*, February 10, 1939.

<sup>370</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, February 15, 1939.

LaGuardia and Rossi—the *San Francisco Chronicle* pictured them both riding to the Exposition in a stagecoach<sup>371</sup>—since the United States Conference of Mayors was still advocating some sort of permanent relief.<sup>372</sup> Although the mayors were also talking national defense, they still were asking for another \$150 million WPA deficiency appropriation.<sup>373</sup> The Hetch Hetchy threats from Ickes continued through the end of the year. By the end of 1939, with increased employment and an imminent war, public relief was no longer of primary importance to the federal government, and mayors had to present new issues and new programs to support continued city development. They continued to meet and ask for increased aid and to support one another in reinforcing their ties to the federal government.

Rossi's reelection to the Conference of Mayors' board of trustees was confirmed at the May 18, 1939, meeting.<sup>374</sup> LaGuardia was reelected president unanimously. But the headlines were not as large, and the mayors' conference was not covered nearly as well as previous conferences had been.

Rossi formally entered the race for mayor for his third term in June of 1939.<sup>375</sup> A *San Francisco Examiner* article noted that Rossi at 61 “had been closely identified with public affairs since 1914 when the late James Rolph, then mayor, placed him on the playground commission.” The article chronicled Rossi's stint as supervisor from 1921 to 1925 and from 1929 to 1931, when he was appointed mayor. It discussed his reelection

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<sup>371</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 14, 1939.

<sup>372</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, March 14, 1939.

<sup>373</sup> *Call Bulletin*, March 14, 1939.

<sup>374</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1939.

<sup>375</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, June 8, 1939.

in 1935.<sup>376</sup>

Rossi was reelected in November of 1939 for a four-year term. His national prominence and ties with New Deal Relief money were able to once again secure his reelection. Soon afterward, federal relief programs all but came to an end; it was obvious that war was going to present new issues and problems for metropolises.

By 1943, it was clear that the war would be won. The Depression was over, the United States was clearly the world leader, and the subconscious need for a paternalistic style of leadership was waning. It was time for new ideas and new leaders to face new challenges.

Rossi ran for a final term as mayor in 1943. He was defeated by a political newcomer who promised to serve just one term. An East Coast writer's polemical and unflattering account of Rossi's administration and the wave of change that swept the city at the war's end was printed in *Time* magazine on November 14, 1943:

In a broom-wielding mode, San Francisco last week swept out the 13-year regime of bald, bland, bumbling Mayor Angelo J. Rossi. Newly installed under the City dome was a newcomer to politics but an old face to San Franciscans, genial Roger Dearborn Lapham ... in the election, labor split the vote three ways, costing Rossi the election.

The same *Time* article of November 14<sup>th</sup> noted how Roosevelt played politics with big-city mayors: "As an employee member of the National War Labor Board, Lapham won praise from Franklin Roosevelt for his fair-mindedness[.]"

Rossi died in 1948 at the age of 70. The funeral cortege stretched for blocks. His estate was valued at \$40,000 plus two parcels of real property, as reported by the *Call*

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

*Bulletin* in March of 1949.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> *Call Bulletin*, March 1, 1949 (headline: "\$40,351 Estate Left by Angelo Rossi").

## VI. CONCLUSION

In the period from 1932 through 1939, survivability or tenure in office was often considered a measure of success. A long tenure in office is one indication that something is being done right, whether that is true or not. Successful mayors during this period were those who were able to evoke a strong feeling of security among the citizens of their cities in a time of economic volatility.<sup>378</sup>

Although Rossi did not have the mass appeal of a LaGuardia, the rhetoric of a Rolph, or the cosmopolitan nature of a Roosevelt, his tenure as mayor of San Francisco was exceeded only by that of his predecessor, James Rolph. As mayor, he led the city through trying times, including a depression and a war. He did so by adopting Roosevelt's paternalistic style of leadership and by downplaying fiscal conservatism and embracing New Deal pragmatism.

Although the federal programs, especially the CWA, drew much controversy, they bolstered the hegemony of city leaders who would support an increased federal role. The New Deal also created a significant federal patronage that would benefit Roosevelt's tenure as president.

The unprecedented new city-federal relationship during the Depression increased Roosevelt's popularity. But his political persona was his ultimate strong point.<sup>379</sup> His persona was greatly enhanced by various federal relief programs. This was equally true of successful Depression-era mayors. The coalitions established during the Depression were both politically and economically useful and necessary. It is not surprising that

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<sup>378</sup> Holli, *The American Mayor*, p. 147.



many attempted to emulate Roosevelt's style, even though ultimately the federal-urban relationship was controlled by Roosevelt.<sup>380</sup>

Because of Roosevelt's ultimate control and popularity, it may be natural to assume that local political leaders were destroyed by his power. However, one historian has argued most eloquently that the key people in Roosevelt's political success were the big-city mayors. The dark side, however, was Roosevelt's unequal and inconsistent treatment of the municipal leaders; he definitely displayed a clear pattern in dealing with them.<sup>381</sup> FDR's ultimate treatment of LaGuardia and other urban leaders, including Curley of Boston, Hague of Jersey City, and to some extent Rossi of San Francisco, exhibited a dichotomy between his heralded paternalistic relationship with citizens and the actual political treatment of big-city mayors. Mayors knew of the political benefits one could derive from obtaining federally sponsored public-improvement projects.<sup>382</sup> For example, Hague delivered the vote in 1932, and Roosevelt saw to it that federal money poured into New Jersey.<sup>383</sup> Roosevelt kept the solidarity of urban voters in check by holding out the carrot of federal relief work programs. This patronage allowed Roosevelt to "discipline and punish opponents."<sup>384</sup>

It has often been said that big-city mayors "have little in common but the lack of a political future."<sup>385</sup> Even assuming that the mayor's job is often a dead end, during the

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<sup>379</sup> David Plotke, *Building*, p. 27.

<sup>380</sup> Flanagan, "Roosevelt," p. 418.

<sup>381</sup> Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, p. 4.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>384</sup> Flanagan, "Roosevelt," p. 434.

<sup>385</sup> Russell D. Murphy, "Whither the Mayors? A Note on Mayoral Careers," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb., 1980): 277.

Depression, big-city mayors prospered and stayed in office for long periods if they tapped into the new reality of urban-federal relationships and mimicked Roosevelt paternalism.

It is hard to overestimate the catastrophic effects of the Great Depression. It changed, in a profound way, the criteria for new sources of authority in political office. It so upset the equilibrium of federal-urban relationships that new and dynamic solutions were necessary. It required new social, economic, and ideological regimes. These remedies, to be effective, needed the acceptance and involvement of the population of urban centers. The need for civic involvement brought big-city mayors to center stage when it came to implementation of federal New Deal programs.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the Depression and the New Deal helped create an atmosphere in which citizens viewed their leaders as father figures, whether on a national or local level. This scenario emboldened leaders to capitalize on this situation as a means of gaining economic and political power. They accomplished this by not only embracing the New Deal but also by creating a persona that indelibly identified the leader as a true patriarch. Angelo J. Rossi was such a leader.

## APPENDIX: LIST OF PERIODICAL SOURCES

Number of Articles	Periodical/Newspaper
53	[unidentifiable newspaper article]
3	...Advertiser
2	Advance Star
1	Alameda ...
3	Alameda Times-St
1	Albany Evening News
1	All papers
2	American Education
1	American Labor Citizen
1	American New York City
1	Apartment Houses and Management
1	Apt. House and Management
4	Argonaut
1	arrived in mail
2	Ashbury Hgts. Advance
4	Bakersfield Californian
1	Bee & Education
1	Bee & Republican
2	Berkeley Gazettes
2	Bnai Brith
1	Boston C.S. Monitor
2	Budde Papers
28	Budde Public Papers
4	Budde's Publication
5	Burlingame Advance Star
1	Calif. Federation News
1	Calif. Voice
5	California Journal
2,647	Call Bulletin
2	Chicago Daily Tribune
2	Chicago Evening America
3	Chicago Herald Examiner
1	Chicago Journal of Commerce
3	Chicago Tribune
2	Chinese American News
5	Christian Science
1	Citizen
16	City-County Record

5	Civic League of Improvement Clubs and Assoc.
3,285	Clipping not labeled
1	Coast Banker (reprint)
1	Coast....
1	Colton California Courier
15	Commercial News
1	Community News
1	Corvallis Herald
1	Court S.F. News
1	Covina Argus
2	Daily Commercial News
1	Daily Inquirer
18	Daily News
1	Dispatch
1	District Budde papers
1	Divisadero Advocate
1	Down Town
1	Emanu-el and the Jewish Journal
1	Emanuel-Jewish Journal
1	Eureka District News
1	Eureka Sentinel
1	Eureka Times
1	Evening Sun
1	Fireman's Fund Record
1	Free Press
6	Fresno Bee
1	Fresno Edition
1	Fresno Republican
1	Gate Valley News
1	Gazette
1	Geary-Stanyan
4	Geneva Progress
2	Geneva-Excelsior Progress
2	Gilroy Evening Dispatch
1	Good Shot
1	Greek Newspaper
4	Haight-Ashbury
1	Half Moon Bay Review
1	Healdsburg Tribune
4	Henry T. Budde's Publication
1	Herald
1	Herald & Express
1	Herald Recorder
2	Herald-Tribune

1	Hollister Free Lance
2	Hollywood Citizen news
1	Honolulu paper
6	Honolulu Star Bulletin
1	Il Fiornale D'Italia
3	Ingleside Progress
1	Inglesive Progress
1	Issued by Mr. Cahill
4	Jackson California Dispatch
1	Jackson Dispatch
1	Jackson Ledger
1	Jamestown
2	Japanese American News
1	Jewish Tribune
1	Kansas City Times
2	Keeler's Hotel Weekly
2	Klamath Falls Orl News
3	L'Italia
3	L.A. Daily News
2	L.A. Evening news
1	L.A. Herald & Express
8	L.A. Times
1	LA Herald & Express
1	LA Times
1	LA. Times
4	Labor Clarion
3	Labor Herald
1	Leo Carrillo's Rodeo and Thrill Circus
1	Letter & Wasp
1	Little City News
3	Long Beach Sun
31	Los Angeles Express
1	Los Angeles Times
1	Lutalia
1	Mahonoy City American
1	Martinez Gazette
1	Masonic World
1	Matherson N.J.
3	Mercury herald
2	Mill Valley California Record
1	Mission Merchants
3	Mission Progress
1	Monitor
1	Matherson N.J.

3	Mercury Herald
2	Mill Valley California Record
1	Mission Merchants
3	Mission Progress
1	Monitor
1	Morning-Delta
1	Motorland
9	Municipal Record
1	Musical America
1	N.Y. Times
1	N.Y.C. World-Telegraph
1	Napa Cal. Journal
3	Napa Register
1	New World Sun Daily
2	New York City...
2	New York Herald
1	New York Mirror
7	New York Times
1	New York World Telegram
1	News Letter & WASP
1	News-Letter & WASP
2	Newsletter & WASP
3	Northern Cal. Democrat
1	NY Herald-Tribune
1	NY Tribune
1	NYC Mid-week pictorial
1	NYC Sun
1	NYC World-Telegraph
1	Oakland City Express
8	Oakland Post Enquirer
43	Oakland Tribune
1	Oakland Free Press
1	Oregon City Enterprise
1	Oregon Morning Sun
6	Oregonian
3	Organized Labor
1	Pac Coast Wall St. Journal
4	Pacific Builder
3	Pacific Coast
6	Pacific News
2	Parent-Teacher Journal
1	Park Presidio Progress
1	Park-Presidio Progress
1	Parkside Journal

4	Pasadena Post
2	Pasadena Star-News
1	PCNS
1	People's World
140	People's World
3	Organized Labor
1	Pac Coast Wall St. Journal
4	Pacific Builder
3	Pacific Coast
6	Pacific News
2	Parent-Teacher Journal
1	Park Presidio Progress
1	Park-Presidio Progress
1	Parkside Journal
4	Pasadena Post
2	Pasadena Star-News
1	PCNS
1	People's World
140	People's World
1	Philly Public Ledger
1	Pittsburg
1	Police & Peace Officers Journal
4	Police and Peace Officers' Journal
1	Police Journal
1	Polk St. Chopper
6	Portland Journal
1	Portland...
3	Presidio Heights Press
1	Press Democrat
3	Press Telegraph
1	Press-Democrat
1	Press-Telegraph
2	Progress
1	Progress-Telegraph
1	Public Schools Bulletin
1	Puente Journal
1	Record
10	Recorder
1	Redding searching
2	Republican
11	Richmond Banner
1	Richmond Progress
1	Richmond Record
2	Riverside California Press

1	Robert O'Brian
1	Roseville Press
1	S.F. Cal Monitor
2	S.F. California News
4	S.F. Commercial News
1	S.F. Employers Council
1	S.F. Express
1	S.F. Herald
1	S.F. Hotel Reporter
1	S.F. Junior Chamber
1	S.F. Leader
2	S.F. Mission News
2	S.F. Municipal Journal
2	S.F. Organized labor
22	S.F. Recorder
1	S.F. Reporter
1	S.F. Review
1	S.F. Shipping Register
1	S.F. Shopping News
1	Progress-Telegraph
1	Public Schools Bulletin
1	Puente Journal
1	Record
10	Recorder
1	Redding searching
2	Republican
11	Richmond Banner
1	Richmond Progress
1	Richmond Record
2	Riverside California Press
1	Robert O'Brian
1	Roseville Press
1	S.F. Cal Monitor
2	S.F. California News
4	S.F. Commercial News
1	S.F. Employers Council
1	S.F. Express
1	S.F. Herald
1	S.F. Hotel Reporter
1	S.F. Junior Chamber
1	S.F. Leader
2	S.F. Mission News
2	S.F. Municipal Journal
2	S.F. Organized Labor



22	S.F. Recorder
1	S.F. Reporter
1	S.F. Review
1	S.F. Shipping Register
1	S.F. Shopping News
1	S.F. Today
1	S.F. Weekly Herald
1	Sac. Coast Wall St. Journal
20	Sacramento California Union
1	Salem Journal
1	San Anselmo Herald
6	San Diego Union
3,989	San Francisco Chronicle
3,862	San Francisco Examiner
11,812	San Francisco News
5	San Jose Mercury Herald
1	San Leandro News
1	San Mateo
4	San Mateo Cal Times
2	San Rafael Independent
3	Santa Barbara Press
1	Santa Clara Journal
5	Santa Cruz Sentinel
1	Santa Maria
5	Santa Rosa Republican
1	Sausalito News
1	Searchlight
2	Seattle Post
2	Sentinel
2	Shipping Register
1	Sonoma Index Tribune
1	South of Market Journal
2	SRPD
1	Star Bulletin
3	Stockton Independent
4	Stockton paper
10	Stockton Record
1	Sun Telegraph
1	Sunday News-Press
1	Sunset Courier
6	Sunset Dispatch
4	Sunset News
1	Sunset Progress
1	Swiss International

1	Swiss Journal
3	The Advertiser
1	The Bakersfield Californian
1	The Banner
1	The California Eastern ...
1	South of Market Journal
2	SRPD
1	Star Bulletin
3	Stockton Independent
4	Stockton paper
10	Stockton Record
1	Sun Telegraph
1	Sunday News-Press
1	Sunset Courier
6	Sunset Dispatch
4	Sunset News
1	Sunset Progress
1	Swiss International
1	Swiss Journal
3	The Advertiser
1	The Bakersfield Californian
1	The Banner
1	The California Eastern ...
1	The Claremont Press
2	The Corcorau News
1	The Delano Record
1	The Fresno Bee
1	The Guarasmarra
1	The Healdsburg Tribune
1	The Home Front
16	The Honolulu Advertiser
10	The Leader
1	The Musical and T
1	The Nippu Jiji
1	The Oakland Telegraph
33	The Recorder
6	The Reporter
1	The Review
2	The Richmond Banner
2	The Sacramento Bee
1	The San Franciscan
1	The Spectator
3	The Times
1	The WASP Newsletter

1	Time
1	Times
1	Times Delta
2	Tribune
47	Twin Peaks Sentinel
1	Vallejo News
2	Vallejo Times Herald
1	Valley Progress
1	Visitacion Val. Program
3	Voice of the Federation
1	Wall-Street Journal
7	Washington Daily News
2	Weekly Commercial News
3	Weekly Herald
9	Western Worker
2	Willows Journal
1	Wilmington Press
1	World Sun Daily
1	World Telegram

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